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ABSTRACT

In 1996, the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University began a 2-year policy study for the State Education Department (SED) of its Schools under Registration Review (SURR) process. The SED identifies and supports New York's low-performing schools for up to 3 years. Then schools that improve are removed from the SURR list, and those that do not are closed or redesigned. The first year of the policy study focused on the effectiveness of SED identification and registration, the capacity of the registration review to identify problems of teaching and learning, and the effectiveness of support to SURR schools. Data were gathered through site visits to 11 schools, document review, and surveys completed by principals and teachers in schools recently undergoing review and schools on the SURR list. Examination of the three areas of study disclosed a number of problems, but four particular areas of tension were identified, and strategies were proposed to deal with each of the four: (1) uniformity versus diversity; (2) performance versus monitoring; (3) standards-setting versus intervention; and (4) capacity-building versus compliance. Analysis suggests that there is a large group of low-performing schools that are not yet designated as SURR. To prevent achievement in those schools from dropping to unacceptable levels, state and local improvement efforts should also be targeted at these schools. (Contains 12 tables, 4 graphs, 5 maps, and 99 references.) (SLD)

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Schools on Notice

ED 421 601

New York State Education Department's 1996–1997

Schools Under Registration Review Process

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Schools on Notice

A Policy Study

of

New York State's

1996-97 Schools Under Registration Review Process

January, 1998

Final Report to the New York State Education Department

by:
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SCHOOLS ON NOTICE

A Policy Study of New York State's 1996-97 Schools Under Registration Review Process

by Carol Ascher, Ken Ikeda and Norm Fruchter

In December 1996, the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University began a two-year policy study for the State Education Department (SED) of its Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) process. The SED identifies and offers supports to New York State's low-performing schools for up to three years; those schools whose performance improves sufficiently are removed from Registration Review, but those which have not met their performance targets are either deregistered and closed or redesigned. The first year of our study has focused on three areas of questions posed by the SED: 1) the effectiveness of the SED's identification and de-registration of low-performing schools; 2) the capacity of the Registration Review to identify problems of teaching and learning in low-performing schools; and 3) the effectiveness of support to SURR schools. Our methodology begins on page 11 of this Executive Summary.

As our study has revealed, New York State Education Department's effort to intervene in failing schools is among the most comprehensive and rigorous of such state efforts. Since the program's inception in 1985, the SED's continuous analysis, reflection and revision have been key to its regular improvement. This flexibility and openness to scrutiny was also reflected in the SED's work relationship with the IESP research team. We are grateful for the unstinting cooperation we experienced from all SED staff throughout the first year of the project.

Our study has revealed four areas of tension in the current SURR process. Although none of these areas have easy solutions, we suggest some possible strategies to ameliorate each.

Uniformity versus Diversity: Low-performing schools are all neglected schools serving low-income children, and the SURR process must be uniform to be

seen as fair. But the sources of neglect creating school-level failure are different, and they may require different strategies, including a greater focus at the district level, to generate needed academic improvement. While 1996 changes in SURR regulations were intended to address this issue, we see a continuing need to improve district accountability.

Performance versus Monitoring: The SURR process is a performance-driven accountability system, in which low-performing schools are designated for, and released from, Registration Review on the basis of test score performance. Although the SED must monitor these schools as they move to reform themselves, it is important that monitoring for compliance not divert school efforts from improving their performance.

Standards-Setting versus Intervention: In New York City, State improvement efforts must work with and through two intervening layers of governance: the Citywide Board of Education and the community school districts and high school superintendencies. In addition to setting standards for schools and districts, the SED must also find ways to assist local school improvement when the intervening layers are either disinclined or unable to respond effectively.

Capacity-building versus Compliance: Unlike high-performing schools, SURR schools have not effectively used their existing autonomy; thus, the SED and local districts are right to insist on compliance in a variety of important areas. Nevertheless, lasting school improvement can only occur through capacity-building that is sustainable without compliance, which means that efforts must be directed to ensuring that *everyone* in the school works together in reflective efforts to resolve continually shifting problems.

1. Assessment and the Identification and De-registration of Low-Performing Schools

Identification. Currently, the identification of SURR schools is based predominantly on test scores, with schools that are "farthest from State standards" identified as SURR. This system has been successful in identifying deeply troubled schools. However, the SED's reliance on standardized tests in a high-stakes accountability system raises several problems, including the likelihood that schools without a genuine capacity to change will focus on testing and test-preparation, and attempt to improve their scores by controlling the body of tested students. Because it is important that schools be held responsible for the performance of *all* students, we applaud the SED for recent policy changes by which all Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and some special education students will be tested, either alongside other students or through Language Assessment Batteries. However, student

retention and special education placement continue to provide schools with ways of removing low-performing students from the testing group. To ensure that test scores reflect the widest possible pool of student test-takers, we urge the SED to move rapidly to increase the incorporation of special education students.

The SED has added an additional category for SURR identification, "a poor learning environment," which consists of a variety of school-based indicators, including conditions that threaten the health, safety, or educational welfare of students such as high rates of student absenteeism or violence and a significant percentage of uncertified teachers. However, so far these indicators have not been used to identify schools under Registration Review. The use of "a poor learning environment," particularly if the indicators are expanded, has the potential to improve school-level identification.

Until now, the heavy reliance on school-level test score data has also tended to create the impression that SURR schools are alike, and that the causes of low-performance are school-based and can be remedied by school-level staff development and instructional efforts, rather than through district-level actions. Although districts have been increasingly brought into the SURR process by having to create Corrective Action Plans (CAP) in support of their SURR schools, the SED can still strengthen its analyses of the district role in low-performance, the effectiveness of district CAPs, and more generally district accountability for low-performing schools.

Using existing New York City Board of Education data, we preliminarily identified four types of SURR schools, each of which has been deeply impacted by, and in some cases created by, district policies :

1) high immigrant/high LEP elementary schools;
2) high mobility elementary schools;
3) underutilized elementary schools;
4) SURR corridor middle-schools.

Interventions to help these schools succeed would include such district-level policies as: re-assigning teachers so that SURR schools do not have disproportionate numbers of inexperienced and unlicensed teachers; assisting uncertified teachers in obtaining advanced training and licensing; reducing overcrowding in some schools; reorganizing special education; and changing feeding patterns so that one or two middle schools do not take the entire burden of students' poor preparation in SURR elementary schools, or that students do not travel through a SURR corridor throughout their public school tenure. In those instances where a school's low performance seems closely linked to district administrative policies, or where a district continues to house a number of low-performing schools, we suggest that the SED and the BOE collaborate to develop strong sanctions to motivate district action.

Even with district changes, each of the school types we have identified need quite specific and quite different school-based interventions if they are to become high-achieving. For example, the high immigrant/high LEP schools need curriculum

and instructional strategies that focus on students whose first language is not English--an under-stressed area in the current array of staff development programs offered to SURR schools. The high-mobility schools need strategies that help incorporate mobile students into classrooms without sacrificing instructional time for stable students, and that build stability and commitment to the school among students, parents, and teachers.

Our analysis also suggests that there are a large group of low-performing schools that are not yet designated as SURR. To prevent achievement in these schools from dropping to unacceptable levels, State and local improvement efforts should also be targeted at these schools.

Removal from SURR and Deregistration. Despite higher targets and an increasing number of schools on the SURR list, the past three years have witnessed notable increases in schools being removed from SURR. Although many of these schools have significantly improved instruction, the urgency to get off SURR has not always given school staff either the will or the capacity for genuine change. Thus, a key task for the SED is to establish whether and why schools are improving or failing to improve. The use of multiple assessments, rather than a single test score, would decrease the likelihood of manipulation and provide a richer picture of school progress. Although the New York State Regents have argued for a unitary system of assessment in the State, the SED might experimentally use New York City data (currently the richest in the State) to create a value-added measure comprised of multiple assessments to assess changes in students' academic learning. As a long-range plan, we suggest that the SED help to strengthen local assessment programs throughout the State, so that more comprehensive measures, including a value-added program, might be instituted statewide.

The SED is correct in wanting to keep a close watch over the progress of SURR schools, and must exercise the option of school closure. However, the Registration Review Process is a performance-based accountability system, and the Commissioner's requirement that schools' Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) and the districts' Corrective Action Plan(CAP) be monitored is contradictory and may actually hinder schools from taking ownership of their own improvement. The SED has shown flexibility and intellectual vigor in continuing to improve its methods of tracking school progress; we hope that, with the Commissioner's permission, it will move to rich narrative reports that help direct technical assistance and supports to SURR schools, while reducing monitoring for compliance.

In schools where the cost of investment in improvement efforts may be too great, we suggest that the SED consider immediately closing the school, rather than subjecting students to the current three-year period on SURR.

2. The Capacity of the Registration Review to Identify Problems in Teaching and Learning.

Newly-identified SURR schools receive a Registration Review visit from a team of educational practitioners, who analyze the school's instructional programs and identify district supports that may be needed. Currently, New York City schools are visited by a mix of upstate and New York City educators; we believe that this mix is fruitful and would provide a similarly useful mix for upstate schools receiving Registration Review visits.

The current Registration Review visits identify the most obvious and observable signs of school failure, but tend not to uncover more subtle instructional problems and do not focus sufficiently on district policies that impact school performance. Registration Review teams need to be better prepared with materials before entering the schools. Team members should also receive training in observation, interviewing, and the constituents of evidence, as well as in diagnosing deeper structural and cultural causes of school failure. Enhanced training is particularly important for Registration Review team leaders and parent representatives. An increase in Effective Schools funding would make money available for this important effort.

While the written report of the Registration Review team is supposed to drive the CEP's and CAP's, some schools are not visited until March, and schools and districts currently delay beginning their CEPs and CAPs for at least a month while they wait for their reports. To expedite the initiation of school planning , we suggest that the Registration Review visits be more closely scheduled, to end in February, and that the Registration Review visit culminate in the visiting team presenting their findings *orally* to both the school's planning team and the whole school in sessions that allow thorough discussions of the school's problems and needed changes. Although a written report will eventually provide important backup, this oral presentation will enable the planning team to begin work *immediately* on their CEP (and the district its CAP).

3. The Effectiveness of Support to SURR Schools

The SED provides supports to SURR schools through four main vehicles: a) through the SED liaisons; b) through mandating and supporting a planning process; c) through technical assistance and other services provided either alone or in collaboration with other agencies; and d), in New York City, through its relationship with the BOE as well as the Community School Districts and the High School Superintendencies.

a. The SED Liaison. The relationship between the SED and individual SURR schools is largely determined by the SED liaisons. These individuals, and the ways

their roles are formulated, are critical to both the support SURR schools receive and to how well the SED can track school progress. Schools and districts do not appear to be receiving sufficient help with self-analysis and planning. While SED liaisons should improve their assistance to school planning teams to develop useful oral Self-Studies and meaningful CEPs, with widespread school ownership, in New York City the Board of Education also needs to become more involved in providing technical supports for planning. School-based planning teams need support to move beyond narrowly targeted responses, packaged curriculum and limited staff development programs to envision more complex but more lasting change, as well as to ensure that the participation of team members, including parents, is genuine.

Although SED liaisons have been increasingly assigned to monitoring roles, we believe that these liaisons will be more effective if they offer targeted technical assistance, which means observing the school carefully in order to analyze the supports the schools need to improve. The current monitoring system can encourage an attitude of unreflective compliance when lasting improvement requires that schools invest deeply in, and own, their improvement process. Narrative reports by SED liaisons would help to direct and target the technical assistance they offer, as well as provide richer and more useful information to the State.

Capacity-building within the SED should focus on developing liaisons' ability to offer a wide range of technical assistance, including analysis of school performance data and assistance to school planning teams; this capacity-building should also increase liaison's skills as observers and analyzers of school instruction and culture, so that they produce the rich narrative reports necessary to inform the SED about the progress of SURR schools.

While the SED is working to strengthen its capacity to track school progress, greater involvement by the BOE and districts would ensure greater local control of accountability.

b. The planning Process. Planning is a major component of the SED's strategy for improving SURR schools, with the potential to move school staff toward genuine and sustainable improvement. However, time constraints and the pressure for compliance often work against this capacity-building. In addition, frequent principal turnover in SURR schools, and the isolation of planners from the rest of the school, limit the buy-in necessary for sustained participation. Finally, many SURR schools do not have sufficient capacity for the demands of genuine planning, and the technical assistance provided has not been sufficient to build enduring capacity.

The planning process should not begin in a school until there is a principal, committed to remaining in the school for at least three years. Incentives to attract effective and committed principals and teachers would help assure school stability and increase instructional quality.

c. Technical Assistance and Supports to SURR Schools. Despite significant SED expenditures, and an array of supports and services which the SED

provides, support to SURR schools remains a patchwork whose utility is often diminished by staff turnover. Moreover, despite SED technical assistance in grant-writing, hurdles created by competitive grants and the difficulty of combining funding streams often prevent SURR schools from receiving needed resources. While schools differ in their entrepreneurial skills, the pressure to use whatever is readily available can encourage SURR schools to devote staff and student time to activities that may not be optimally suited to generating school improvement.

The Teacher Centers, the Harvard Principals' Center Summer Institute, the Reading and Mathematics Institutes, and the School Quality Review Institute constitute the SED's major efforts to strengthen both teaching and administrative leadership in SURR schools. Although all are popular initiatives, none of these programs has been subjected to a systematic comprehensive outside evaluation. Such an evaluation would suggest whether, and how important it is, that these initiatives do not contain the constituents of effective professional development as determined by current research—that there be sustained involvement of a significant proportion of school staff and the inclusion of repeated modeling observation and feedback.

Although the SED has worked with other agencies to strengthen community supports to SURR schools, as well as to establish programs for improving the health of families in these schools, such programs remain at the margins of SED efforts, and their funding streams tend to complicate their use. Therefore, we suggest more focus on providing such supports, as well as to their integration into the overall programming for SURR schools.

Finally, the SED is still struggling to develop a comprehensive list of all supports used by SURR schools, including those offered by local districts, professional organizations, school reform organizations, community, and church groups. To ensure that each school is receiving what it needs, SED should create a school-by-school inventory of services and supports.

d. New York City- The Relationship to the Board of Education, Community School Districts and High School Superintendencies. Achieving accountability in the SURR process in New York City's school system presents additional problems for the State Education Department. Although the SED tends to treat the Board of Education as the local education agency, conveying information between the State and any individual low-performing school can involve two intermediaries. All mandates, requests for information, and time-lines received from the State must be considered by the Board of Education before being relayed to the 32 community school districts and the six high-school superintendencies, which then make their own judgments before passing them on to their local schools.

The SED has worked hard to increase cooperation with New York City's Schools Chancellor, as well as with Board of Education personnel. For example, the current version of the Comprehensive Education Plan, an interactive computerized format, is the result of a BOE-SED collaboration. In addition, the new authority granted the New York City Schools Chancellor by the 1996 governance legislation

may help to streamline the layers of authority and increase the responsiveness of community school districts.

Methodology

Between December 1996 and September 1997, the IESP conducted nearly 70 interviews with individuals in the State Education Department, school districts (in New York City, the Board of Education and community school districts), and SURR schools, as well as with parents of SURR school students and representatives from the nonprofit sector, including organizations and advocacy groups working with SURR schools.

To clarify the identification and diagnoses of SURR schools, we participated in five of the 24 Registration Review visits in New York City in 1996-97, shadowing the teams of educational practitioners as they observed the newly-identified schools, discussed their observations, and drew up and presented their findings.

To understand how the staff in SURR schools plan for improvement, and ultimately produce the required Comprehensive Education Plans, we spent a full day in each of 12 SURR schools - including those in Rochester, Hempstead, and Newburgh—interviewing planning team members, and attending planning meetings. To clarify the district-based Corrective Action Plans, we talked to personnel in three districts whose responsibilities involved support to SURR schools.

Our analysis of the services provided to SURR schools, as well as the SURR process more generally, was enriched by two sets of surveys sent to:

- A sample of principals and teachers in schools identified during 1996-97, which had recently undergone the Registration Review visit and were currently in the process of planning (group 4);

- A sample of principals and teachers in schools which have been on the SURR list from two to nine years, including those currently undergoing Redesign (groups 1-3).

Finally, we analyzed the burgeoning literature on state programs for low-performing schools, as well as recent research literature on school reform, capacity building, staff development, and planning.

Introduction

> The Registration Review process is the primary method by which the State Board of Regents holds schools accountable for educational performance. Registration Review is intended to measurably improve student performance, by helping school districts correct situations that impede quality education.
>
> --New York State Education Department[1]

In 1985, two years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* prompted widespread concern about the nation's lagging educational standards, New York State became one of the first states to identify its low-performing schools. The State Education Department's (SED) first Comprehensive Assessment Report listed 504 poorly performing or CAR schools. Almost 80 percent of these CAR schools were in New York City, and the proportion of low-performing schools in NYC would increase in succeeding years.

In 1989, when the CAR list became the list of Schools Under Registration Review (SURR), the State required that all schools within its jurisdiction be registered. This, in turn, enabled the SED to take the further step of revoking registration. The creation of state leadership in New York City, currently an Associate Commissioner with primary responsibility for low-performing schools, has focused State efforts to improve schools in New York City. Finally, the New York State Board of Regents' active involvement in the SURR process has given a strong moral authority to State efforts to intervene in low-performing schools.

Over the past eight years since the initiation of SURR, nearly every aspect of the State Education Department's process for low-performing schools has changed: the standard by which schools are identified, the role of the SED in supporting and/or monitoring the schools, the length of time a school can remain on SURR, and the criteria for getting off the SURR list. Indeed, the SED intends to move the State's schools to higher standards using a continually raised bar.

Briefly, New York's schools are currently identified as under Registration Review if they are either "farthest from meeting the state performance standards" or offer "a poor learning environment."[2]

The process contains several basic steps:

- an annual notification to those schools whose assessment results or dropout rates are "farthest from state standards," or which offer a "poor learning environment";

- a period in which low-performing schools and their districts can appeal their designation by providing information showing they are not among those schools "most in need of improvement";

- a formal announcement of those schools identified as under Registration Review;

- Registration Review visits by teams of practitioners to all newly-identified SURR schools to assess the areas in which the schools must improve and the resources needed;

- a period during which the schools and their districts create formal and coordinated plans for change;

- the provision of resources and assistance to the schools, as well as SED monitoring of the school improvement process, for up to three years; and finally,

- based on annual information on test performance in the subject(s) in which the school was identified, as well as supplementary data, either removal of the school from the SURR list or its de-registration and closure.

New York State's SURR Schools

The New York State Education Department identified 139 public schools as SURR between 1989-90 and 1996-97. Of these, 40 (28.7%) either improved sufficiently to be removed from the SURR list or were reorganized or closed, and 99 (71.3%) continue to be on the SURR list as of the 1996-97 academic year. Many of these 99 schools were placed under Registration Review prior to the three-year limit, and in 1996-97 were given two more years to improve before losing their registration. The 99 SURR schools span the public school range: 59 are elementary schools, 25 are middle schools or junior high schools, and 15 are high schools. Some of these schools also form SURR corridors, in which students move from kindergarten through 12th grade, spending the entirety of their educational careers in low-performing schools.

Since 1989, the overwhelming majority of SURR schools have been in New York City, with only 14 upstate schools identified over the eight years. As of 1996-97, there are 92 schools in New York City under Registration Review, with 33 having been removed from SURR since 1989. The over-representation of low-performing schools in New York City is in part related to the concentration of students living in poverty and the influx of immigrant students. While New York City educates over a million students each year, or 37 percent of the entire state's students, the City's public schools serve 63 percent of the state's students living in poverty, and 80 percent of the state's students with limited English proficiency.[3] Moreover, even within New York City, SURR schools serve disproportionate numbers of students of color compared to other public schools: these schools are 38.8 percent black, 57.5 percent Hispanic, and only 1.6 percent white; by contrast, all New York City Schools are 36.3 percent black, 37.1 percent Hispanic, 16.6 percent white and 10 percent other.[4]

SURR schools are rare in the rest of the State: there are seven SURR schools in other urban areas, including Buffalo, Newburgh, Rochester, and Utica, as well as the communities of Hempstead and Roosevelt on Long Island. However, the disproportion between students of color and white students attending such schools is even greater than in New York City: enrollment in the few SURR schools outside New York City is 56.7 percent black, 25.4 percent Hispanic, and 16.0 percent white; by contrast, all other New York State schools are only 10.6 percent black, 5.5 percent Hispanic, and 81.1 percent white.[5]

Beyond the effects of students' backgrounds on achievement, most visitors to New York SURR schools will quickly sense that these are neglected schools. New York City's SURR schools are located in the City's poorest neighborhoods, and the school facilities are often old, overcrowded, and in need of serious repair. (In Chapter 2 we point to other systemic problems, such as fewer experienced and fully licensed teachers, and fewer teachers with advanced degrees.) Although the upstate SURR schools appear physically newer and better maintained, SURR schools throughout the state have nearly a third fewer library books per student (10.2 v. 15.2) and similarly fewer computers per 100 students (7.4 v. 10.6) than other schools.[6]

Moreover, New York State's SURR schools demonstrate the broader truth of the 1994 finding that test performance in New York City is related to the school's emphasis on academic subjects.[7] Currently, only 2.1 percent of the students in New York City's SURR high schools and 18 percent of all students in upstate SURR high schools receive Regents-endorsed diplomas, compared with 18.6 percent for all other New York City public schools and 46 percent for all other schools in the State.[8]

Previous Studies of the State's Intervention in Low-Performing Schools

One of the strengths of the New York State Education Department has been its openness to scrutiny and analyses about its processes for identifying and

intervening in low-performing schools. The Educational Priorities Panel (EPP), a coalition of major New York City organizations concerned with education and child welfare, has conducted two major policy studies. *Small Change*, issued in 1988, reviewed the State's earlier Comprehensive Assessment Report (CAR) Program. The EPP noted that there was "sufficient public will" for turning around New York's schools, and that opportunities existed for both legislative reform and improvements at the Board of Education in New York City. However, *Small Change* criticized the CAR program for stigmatizing schools by "branding them as In Need of Improvement, when *every* school in New York State meets that criteria," and noted that for many schools "resentment" at being a CAR school "eclipsed efforts to improve their schools."[9] The report also argued that the CAR Program was too heavily based on planning, when "school-based planning is not a panacea" and CAR schools suffered from a number of other problems, including overcrowding and a dearth of qualified teachers.[10]

Getting off the List, issued by the EPP in fall 1996, focused on those New York City SURR schools that had improved sufficiently to be removed from Registration Review. This second EPP study credited the State Education Department "with pursuing an effort to curtail unacceptably low achievement rates in New York City under three Commissioners in the face of varying levels of cooperation by the Board of Education, unions, and the state legislature."[11] The report also acknowledged the feeling of stigma in SURR schools, and noted that most SURR principals perceived the SURR process as biased against schools serving high-poverty and high-immigrant populations. However, *Getting off the List* argued that the "total reorganization or closure of schools must remain an ultimate sanction and it must be utilized within a set time period," since the possibility of school closure "created a willingness on the part of the staff to adopt new strategies."[12] Schools that got off the list had developed good working relationships between a capable principal and a strong planning committee that focused on developing instructional strategies. Principals and staff members gave "their primary attention to solving the problem of low student achievement."[13]

A third report, *Perform or Perish*, was issued by the Advisory Council to the New York State Board of Regents Subcommittee on Low-Performing Schools in spring 1994. Based on forums and public testimony, *Perform or Perish* analyzed the entire SURR process. The Advisory Council recognized the SED's efforts to improve low-performing schools, both in New York City and throughout the state. However, it criticized the heavy emphasis on planning, as well as the inadequacy of support to SURR schools, pointing out that the schools and their districts "vary greatly in their capacity and readiness to engage in programs of self-improvement."[14] The Advisory Council also noted serious inequities in resources between low-performing and other schools, and argued for revising the State aid formula to provide additional funds for assisting SURR schools. Finally, *Perform or Perish* recommended a stronger state role when SURR schools continue to fail.

Most recently, in July 1997, a report to New York State's Board of Regents by Deputy Commissioner Kadamus showed "significant progress" in test scores by schools under Registration Review, and argued that "the data supports the idea that school-by-school reform works."[15] While the Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP) shares the Deputy Commissioner's satisfaction with the gains shown by SURR schools, we note that these schools generally remain very low-performing, and their one-year may not indicate a significant and sustainable increase in capacity among school staff.

IESP Study of the SURR Process

In December 1996, the Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP) at New York University began a two-year policy study for the State Education Department of its system for identifying, serving, and de-registering the State's low-performing schools.

During this first year, our study has been directed to answering questions posed by the State in three areas:

1. Assessment and the Identification and De-Registration of Low-Performing Schools

How effective are SED's assessment processes for both the initial identification of SURR schools and for the subsequent decision to deregister? How do we assess students to ensure that achievement is increasing and that changes in test scores do not simply reflect changes in demographics, test preparation, etc.? How can the amended regulations and the new SED assessments under development best be used to improve the process? Is there a way to incorporate into the new State assessment program a value-added approach to assessing improvement in education?

2. The Capacity of the Registration Review to Identify Problems of Teaching and Learning.

How does the SED identify the problems with teaching and learning in SURR schools? Given the resources available to conduct Registration Review, what would be an effective process for diagnosing problems with leadership, curriculum, instruction, etc.? Does the research identify any practices that allow us to quickly and effectively assess the school's program?

3. The Effectiveness of Support to SURR Schools

How effective are SED, BOE, and districts in supporting and assisting the efforts of SURR schools to improve and how might these efforts be strengthened? How can SED best use its limited human and financial resources in providing assistance to SURR schools? How can SED's efforts be best coordinated with those of other agencies providing services to these schools?

Between December 1996 and September 1997, our IESP team conducted nearly 70 interviews with individuals in the State Education Department, school districts (in New York City, the Board of Education and community school districts), and individual schools, as well as with parents of students in SURR schools and representatives from the nonprofit sector, including organizations and advocacy groups working with SURR schools.

To clarify the identification and diagnoses of new SURR schools, we participated in 5 of the 24 1996-97 Registration Review visits in New York City, each time spending three to four days shadowing Registration Review teams as they observed these newly-identified schools, discussed their observations, and drew-up and presented their findings.

To understand how the staff in SURR schools plan for improvement, and ultimately produce the required Comprehensive Education Plans, we spent a full day in each of 12 additional SURR schools-- including those in Rochester, Hempstead, and Newburgh-- interviewing teachers and principals who were members of planning teams, and attending planning meetings. To understand the district-based Corrective Action Plans, we talked to personnel in three districts whose responsibilities involved support to SURR schools.

Our analysis of the services provided to SURR schools, as well as the SURR process more generally, has been enriched by feedback from two sets of surveys:

- To a sample of principals and teachers in schools identified during 1996-97, which had recently undergone the Registration Review visit and were currently in the process of planning (group 4);

- To a sample of principals and teachers in schools which have been on the SURR list from two to nine years, including those currently undergoing Redesign (groups 1-3). The methodology of this survey is described in detail on page 112.

Our study also situates the SED's efforts in the context of a burgeoning literature on state programs for low-performing schools, as well as in the recent research literature on school reform, capacity building, staff development, and planning.

While the State's three questions have structured our research project, they have also raised several related issues: whether differentiating both the external and internal or systemic stresses on SURR schools might help shape SED assistance to these schools; how the capacity to improve SURR schools might best be developed at the school site; and how planning and monitoring might be improved to help build school-based capacity.

Our study suggests four areas of tension in the current SURR process:

1) ***Uniformity versus Diversity:*** Low-performing schools are generally administratively neglected schools that serve low-income children. But because the sources that contribute to school-level failure differ, SURR schools may require different intervention strategies, including a greater focus at the district level, to generate the necessary academic improvement.

2) ***Capacity-building versus Compliance:*** Unlike high-performing schools, SURR schools have not been able to maximize their existing levels of autonomy. The SED and local districts must therefore impose compliance mandates to begin the improvement process. But lasting school improvement requires capacity-building that is ultimately sustainable beyond compliance--*everyone* in the school must learn to work together and develop reflective processes to resolve continually shifting instructional problems.

3) ***Performance versus Monitoring:*** The SURR process is designed as a performance-driven accountability system, in which schools are designated for, and released from, Registration Review primarily on the basis of test scores. Although the SURR process requires some monitoring as schools begin to reform themselves, monitoring for compliance should not impede school efforts from developing internal accountability for their performance.

4) ***Standards-Setting versus Intervention:*** In New York City, State improvement efforts must work with and through two intervening layers of governance—the Citywide Board of Education and the community school districts and high school superintendencies. To what extent, and in what ways, can the State intervene to propel local school improvement when the intervening layers, particularly recalcitrant school districts, seem either disinclined or unable to respond effectively to the mandates and resource offerings of the SURR process?

In Chapter I, Accountability in the SURR Process, we describe the relationship between the State, districts, and schools, as well as the peculiar issues

raised by New York City's two-tiered governance structure. In addition, we suggest ways to simplify the tight first-year schedule for newly-identified SURR schools. Chapter II, SURR Schools and their Community- and System-Based Stresses, uses New York City data to pinpoint some similarities and differences in SURR schools that may help to target effective school-focused assistance. Chapter III, Diagnosing the Causes of School Failure: the Registration Review Visit, describes the first major component of the SURR process after identification, and answers the SED's questions regarding how well these visits by external practitioners analyze the school's problems of teaching and learning. Chapter IV develops our analysis of Planning and Capacity-Building in the SURR Process, and suggests how the SED might help build schools' capacity to develop a culture of continuous improvement. Chapter V answers the SED's questions regarding The Effectiveness of Support to SURR Schools. In addition to reviewing the variety of supports provided by the SED, this chapter analyzes the perceptions of SURR school principals and teachers about the assistance they receive. Chapter VI, Assessing SURR School Progress, reviews recent SURR school performance; discusses strategies schools may use to get off the list; and analyzes the possibilities and problems of using a value-added approach in New York State. Chapter VII, An Overview of State Initiatives for Low-Performing Schools and the Literature on School Reform, reviews recent reports on state interventions in low-performing schools, as well as research on systemic reform, including planning and capacity-building; this chapter also suggests several changes that New York and other states might make to improve their processes for low-performing schools. Each chapter ends with policy recommendations.

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I. Accountability in the SURR Process

> "We have taken steps to force failing schools to reform, reorganize, or close and have amended the regulations that govern registration review to improve our capacity to identify and remedy low performance in schools."
>
> --Carl T. Hayden, Chancellor, Board of Regents
> --Richard P. Mills, Commissioner of Education[16]

The New York State Education Department (SED) has legal responsibility for the quality of education in the State's 4,092 public schools in 709 districts (counting New York City as one district). For many years, the State Education Department concerned itself mainly with regulating health, safety and fiscal accountability, as well as assuring compliance in federal programs like Title I. However, in its growing commitment to raising academic performance, the SED has more recently initiated report cards, performance-based benchmarks, curriculum frameworks, and accreditation standards. SED involvement in academic performance has also led to a more sophisticated state system of data reporting and analysis of school performance, as well as monitoring and assistance to low-performing schools.

New York State's process for Schools Under Registration Review has involved new SED authority over several elements:

1) Setting the standards for school performance, as well as setting benchmarks for the improvement of low-performing schools.

2) Creating a complex system of reporting school and/or district performance.

3) Organizing groups of educators to analyze the problems in low-performing schools.

4) Requiring coordinated school and district plans for improvement, and becoming the final arbiter of acceptable plans.

5) Mandating a process of redesign for those schools that do not meet the State target for improvement within a designated period.

6) Removing from Registration Review those schools that improve sufficiently to meet their performance targets, as well as de-registering those schools that fail to improve sufficiently.

Like accountability systems that have recently evolved in other states, New York's SURR process assumes that improving accountability will help to spur school improvement. Thus the SED has set clear goals for student performance, publicized information about school success or failure, and created significant sanctions, including the stigma of well-publicized school failure and the possibility of school closure. There is evidence to support the SED's assumptions about the power of an accountability system with clear sanctions; the Educational Priorities Panel's 1996 report concluded that SURR designation has "encouraged" school improvement, and the threat of school closure has created "a willingness on the part of the staff to adopt new strategies."[17] This willingness appears to be generating real improvement in some schools. Despite raised State targets in both 1995-96 and 1996-97, eleven New York City schools were removed from SURR in 1995-96 and ten in 1996-97, over twice as many schools as in any previous year.[18] Moreover, a comparison of 1996 and 1997 New York City SURR middle school reading performance showed gains in over 80 percent of the schools.[19]

New York State's Designation of SURR

The process used by the SED to assess the performance of New York's schools has remained the same since 1989. Briefly, the State samples school performance by testing students in both math and reading in grades 3, 6, and 11, and reading in grade 8-- considered to be benchmark years. Schools can be identified as low-performing by their poor math and/or reading scores in any of these grades. High dropout rates and low pass rates in writing are used as additional determinants of SURR status at the high school level.

In 1996-1997, the State also raised the percentage of test takers required to reach the State minimum competency level in all tested areas, and for all assessed grades, from 65% to 90% at or above the State's minimum level. The decision to remove, de-register or continue a school as SURR was to be based on the school closing a specified segment of the gap between its baseline performance and the 90% State standard in its identified area(s).

Until the fall of 1996, the State Education Department designated schools as under Registration Review if they were below State standards and showed a multi-year trend in downward performance. However, evidence suggested that "catfish" schools, whose scores hovered at the bottom and therefore could not decrease, avoided identification. Thus, in the spring of 1996, the State eliminated the downward trend and designated schools under Registration Review if they were "farthest from State

standards." In 1996-97, twenty-six additional schools were designated as SURR under this new criteria.

New York State's schools at all levels may also be declared "a poor learning environment" if their students do poorly on any of the State's standardized tests, and the school is the subject of persistent parent complaints to the SED, or it has conditions that the State believes threaten the health, safety, or educational welfare of its students. These conditions include high rates of student absenteeism, inordinate levels of violence, an excessive number of suspensions, and a significant percentage of uncertified teachers.[20] No school has thus far been identified as SURR because of being a "poor learning environment."

In addition, the SED has introduced a secondary category, "most in need of improvement," which allows districts to appeal an identification with local assessment data and/or relevant information concerning extraordinary, temporary circumstances that may have affected student performance.[21] Of those schools identified in summer 1996, the SED reports that almost half submitted appeals of additional data and narrative reports, and a significant proportion were successful.

Finally, the SED has expanded the body of tested students through a policy change regarding Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Until 1996-97, these students were exempted from the tested performance group for their first 20 months in a school. However, with the recent policy change, LEP students are given the English as a Second Language (ESL) test upon registering in a school, and are incorporated into the tested performance group as soon as they achieve a score at or above the 30th percentile on the ESL test.[22] Given the time period it takes most students to reach the 30th percentile, this will decrease the number of students sitting for the English-language tests; however, it should increase schools' accountability for LEP students.

The Four Groups of SURR. The requirement that all public schools in New York State be registered enables the State to revoke the registration of any school that persistently fails to improve. However, for a number of years, while some schools improved sufficiently to get off the list, other schools continued to languish on SURR. Thus in 1996-97, with the aim of moving toward a three-year limit, the State initiated a transitional classification system, comprising four distinct groups of schools within SURR:

- Group 1. Includes 16 schools that have remained under Registration Review since 1989, and were placed under Corrective Action in October, 1995. Of these schools, 13 were closed in June 1996 and reopened as redesigned schools in September 1996. Two schools had neither submitted a closure and redesign plan nor met their performance targets, and were placed in Corrective Action in June 1997. One school was removed from Registration Review in November 1996 because it had achieved its performance target.

- Group 2. Includes five schools identified between 1989 and 1993, but not placed under Corrective Action or redesigned, and 22 schools identified between 1989 and 1993, all of which were placed under Corrective Action in September 1996 and given two years to meet their performance targets.

- Group 3. Includes 31 schools identified as SURR during the 1994-1995 and 1995-1996 school years; these schools were reviewed in June 1997, and were either removed from Registration Review or placed under Corrective Action, with two more years to meet their performance targets.

- Group 4. Includes 25 schools newly identified as of 1996-1997; all have a maximum of three years to meet their performance targets.

The Process for Newly-Identified SURR Schools

The State's process for SURR schools begins with initial identification and continues for up to three years with annual planning, assistance, and monitoring until the school is deregistered or improves sufficiently to be taken off the SURR list. However, the first year for newly-identified schools can include long periods of uncertainty and waiting for the components of the SURR process to be completed, as well as intense, highly-congested periods of work to comply with SURR mandates. Although the SED has designed each of the SURR components to fit together into a coherent and ordered process, schools can experience the SURR sequence as discontinuous and rushed, and their attempts to comply with the SURR mandates can impede their efforts to build school capacity. We describe the SURR sequence for newly-identified schools in detail below to suggest that some simplification in the current process could make the first year more capacity-building for SURR schools.

The table below summarizes the SED's timetable for the SURR components for newly-identified schools, along with the actual time within which the components occurred during the 1996-97 year.

Table 1.1
Timing for Newly-Identified SURR Schools

	State Target	'96-'97 Range	Proposed Activity Time-line
State Notification	summer months	summer months	summer months
Appeal (district provision of local assessment data)	summer - mid-October	summer- mid-November	summer- mid-November
Identification	mid-October	mid-November	mid-November
Written Self-Study	30 days - 120 days (mid-Oct-mid-Nov)	15 days - 140 days	Oral Self-Study, prior to RRV
Registration Review Visit	Starts within 30 days of identification (mid-Nov - mid-Feb)	December 2 - mid-March	January-February
Registration Review Report	30 days after RRV	30-72 days after RRV	time open; not critical to beginning CEPs and CAPs
Preparation of Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) and district Corrective Action Plan (CAP)	mid March-June 30th	mid April-June 30th	From February (at conclusion of RRV) to June 30th
CEP and CAP approval	July 31st	July 31st	July 31st
Implementation	August 31st	September	September

Low-performing schools are identified by the SED in summer, and local districts can then supply the State with additional data that might support an appeal. This appeal process has been important in reducing complaints of misidentification. Nevertheless, the process is time-consuming for district, Board of Education (BOE), and SED staff. In 1996, this process took three months, and lasted into mid-November.

Newly-identified schools are required to conduct written Self-Studies in early fall in preparation for their Registration Review Visit. This aspect of the process is allotted 30 days to three months, depending on the scheduling of the Registration Review Visit. We describe these Self-Studies in greater detail in chapter 3; here it is important to note that, as currently designed and implemented, the Self-Studies are often burdensome but rarely useful documents. We found few Self-Studies that analyzed the schools sufficiently to help the Registration Review teams or direct the schools' planning process. We recommend that schools' planning teams prepare an oral Self-Study for presentation to the Registration Review team.

Since the Registration Review Visits begin only after the formal list of SURR schools is completed, the State targets them to begin in November and run through February. However, due to some lengthy appeals, the 1996-97 Registration Review Visits started in December and continued into April. Although the orchestration of teams and scheduling of school visits is a demanding and complex endeavor, we suggest that the time-frame for Registration Review visits be shortened. Optimally, these visits should be scheduled during a one-month period, from mid-January to mid-February.

Newly-identified SURR schools are asked to spend the spring months developing and producing their plans for improvement. However, they currently wait for the Registration Review Reports before beginning their planning. Given the 30-day turnaround time allowed by the State for the completion of the Registration Review reports, the school's planning process begins a month after the actual Registration Review visit--depending on the scheduling of a particular visit, between January and April. Schools then have until July 31st--between three and six months--to complete their plans. (Because of delayed visits in spring 1997, had the last three schools visited waited for the 30-day turnaround, they would have had a maximum of two months to work on their CEPs or Comprehensive Education Plans.)

To reduce the waiting time for the Registration Review reports, we suggest that the Registration Review teams take more care with their oral exit presentation. Given a clear and focused oral team report, the school would have greater opportunity to discuss the Registration Review Visit's findings, and the planning team could proceed immediately to develop their CEP.

State approval of school CEPs and district Corrective Action Plans (CAP) occurs during the summer, when both schools and districts are also asked to answer questions and respond to requests for revisions. This approval process involves an extra tier in New York City, because the Central Administration must also approve

the school and district plans; however, in 1996-97, the SED and BOE expedited the process by jointly reviewing the CEPs and CAPs.

School implementation of the approved CEPs is supposed to begin within 30 days of approval. In reality, implementation commences at the start of the fall semester, along with State monitoring for compliance.

District Roles in SURR

Understanding that dysfunctional schools are often poorly served by their districts, the SED has increasingly worked to make districts accountable for their low-performing schools. In 1992, to ensure that the districts understood their low-performing schools' plans for improvement and to encourage their support of these efforts, New York State began to require districts to sign-off on their SURR schools' Comprehensive Education Plans (CEPs).[23] Despite this requirement, a number of schools continued to languish on the SURR list, and staff in these perennially poor-performing schools often maintained that they were orphaned by their districts. Thus, in 1996-97, the State increased pressure on districts by demanding a reciprocal district plan, the Corrective Action Plan (CAP), for each of the district's SURR schools. Moreover, the district's CAP was described for the first time as "contractual."[24]

Through major change in New York City's educational governance, passed by the State legislature in December 1996, New York City's Schools Chancellor now has the power to appoint community school district superintendents and to remove both superintendents and principals for persistent educational failure.[25] As a result, superintendents in New York City have recently been replaced, in part under pressure from the State. In addition, through the actions of the New York City Schools Chancellor, nine NYC schools were taken away from their districts and placed in a Chancellor's district.

Evidence suggests that when districts do realize that it is in their power to eliminate unacceptably low performance by replacing principals and instructional staff and altering feeder patterns, the improvement can be dramatic. However, although the IESP survey suggests that many SURR schools rely on their districts for specific programmatic support (see Chapter V.), few districts exhibit the necessary urgency to rethink staffing, alter student feeder patterns, shift resources, or change other operating procedures to improve their SURR schools.

Moreover, all districts with SURR schools are supposed to appoint special liaisons to work with these schools; yet a number of districts appear to have made no such appointment. Almost 30 percent of the principal and teacher respondents to the IESP survey indicated little or no consultation with their districts about support for their CEPs. Equally important, interviews with SURR school staff suggest that many continue to see their districts as uninvolved with and uninterested in their school's improvement.

Table 1.2 shows the activities of district representatives throughout the State (but largely of Community School District representatives in New York City), as perceived by SURR school principals and teacher-planning team members who responded to the IESP survey (details of the survey methodology are in Chapter V).

Table 1.2
SURR Staff Perceptions of District Representative Roles

District Representatives have:	Principal (n= 26)	Teachers (n= 70)	Total (n= 96)
attended meetings	63.0%	66.2%	65.3%
held capacity-building sessions for school staff	29.6%	22.5%	24.5%
helped the school develop grants	48.1%	46.5%	46.9%
provided the school with resources	70.4%	52.1%	57.1%
situated a Teacher Center in the school	29.6%	26.8%	27.6%
limited their role to monitoring	3.7%	11.3%	9.2%
Don't know	0%	4.2%	3.1%

Not surprisingly, principals, who have more contact with their district, see the district as supportive in more areas than do teachers. Nevertheless, only 70 percent of the principals believed that the district representative provided the school with resources, under half felt they had been helped by the district representative in developing grants, and barely 30 percent of all principals perceived their district representative as having helped to situate a Teacher Center in their school.

Although SED liaisons work directly with districts before approving their consolidated Title I applications, and liaisons are supposed to visit district offices regularly, the district link is too often weak. SED monitoring of the adequacy and timeliness of districts' compliance with their CAPs is currently done primarily through tracking those district-sponsored resources mentioned in the schools' CEPs. Although this may pick up specific services the schools have asked for, it can easily miss district policies relating to feeder patterns and staffing. We recommend that the SED increase their focus on district policies, particularly in those districts that contain a number of SURR schools.

New York City. Achieving accountability in the SURR process in New York City's school system presents additional problems for the State Education Department. Although the SED tends to treat the Board of Education as the local education agency, conveying information between the State and any individual low-performing school can involve two intermediaries. All mandates, requests for information, and time-lines received from the State must be considered by the Board of Education before being relayed to the 32 community school districts and the six high school superintendencies, which then make their own judgments before passing them on to their local schools.

The SED has worked hard to increase cooperation with New York City's Schools Chancellor, as well as with Board of Education personnel. For example, the current version of the Comprehensive Education Plan, an interactive computerized format, is the result of a BOE-SED collaboration. In addition, the new authority granted the New York City Schools Chancellor by the 1996 governance legislation may help to streamline the layers of authority and increase the responsiveness of community school districts.

State Liaisons and the Monitoring of SURR Schools

The daily activities of interpreting State mandates and working directly with SURR schools is carried out by 28 SED liaisons. While several liaisons for upstate schools have their offices in Albany, the majority of liaisons are located downstate at the SED office in Brooklyn. Downstate liaisons concerned with New York City's SURR schools work in borough-based teams. Depending on the number of schools identified in a borough in any one year, each liaison as well as the team supervisor is charged with 3-6 SURR schools. Some liaisons are also given monitoring and administrative responsibilities in specific State program areas, such as School Improvement, Early Childhood, Title I, and high schools.

As of 1996-97, the liaisons' roles in SURR schools have become differentiated, depending on the status of the school. In newly-identified (Group 4) schools, liaisons are to visit a half-day each week. Their activities include preparing the school and the visiting team for the Registration Review visit; assisting the school in completing its self study; attending planning meetings as the school develops its Comprehensive Education Plan; and ensuring that the district's Corrective Action Plan and the School's CEP are compatible. Thus, liaisons offer technical assistance, act as facilitators, advocates, information-providers, and as what one liaison referred to as "critical friends."

In an analysis of its 1996-1997 Registration Review process, the SED surveyed principals of the twenty-five newly-identified SURR schools about the support provided by the SED liaisons. Of the 18 principals answering their questionnaire, two-thirds saw their SED liaison as having been helpful in preparing them and their teaching staff for their Registration Review visit. However, three principals said

their SED liaison had not been helpful, and two principals felt their liaisons were only "somewhat helpful"; these principals complained that the SED liaison had not met with the entire staff and noted that they would have liked to see more of their liaison.[25]

Our own survey of principals and teachers in newly-identified schools supports the SED findings. Although our questionnaire asked only where respondents receive assistance, principals and teachers responded that their SED liaisons were most helpful in the general preparation for the Registration Review visits, but less helpful in the specific activities that might usefully support this process.

Table 1.3
Group 4 Staff Perceptions of SURR Liaison Roles

The Liaison has:	Principal (n=11)	Teacher (n=22)	Total (n=33)
helped us with our Self-Study	18.2%	15.0%	16.1%
provided an orientation to ensure that we understood the Registration Review Visit	100.0%	75.0%	83.9%
helped interpret school data provided to the Registration Review Team	45.5%	45.0%	45.2%
helped conduct a survey of school resources	18.2%	35.0%	29.0%

Although teachers may not see SED liaisons as often as principals, and so may have less reliable perceptions, less than half of all principals reported that their liaison had helped interpret school data, and under a fifth reported that their liaison assisted them with their Self-Study or helped to analyze the school's resources. During two of the five Registration Review visits shadowed by the IESP team, principals were still disputing the data on which their SURR designation was based. Thus, preparing schools for the Registration Review visit by interpreting data should be a key role for SED liaisons.

In Group 3 schools identified in 1994-95 and 1995-96, liaisons are to visit bi-weekly; their responsibilities include attending planning visits; assisting the school community in developing the services to support their CEP; helping to coordinate services from other agencies; and supporting the implementation of Models of Excellence.

In Group 2, or Corrective Action schools, SED liaisons are supposed to meet with the school, its district, or BOE staff weekly. At the school, they are to review the progress of the school's redesign team; and monitor the development of the individual redesign plans.

Finally, in Group 1, or Redesign schools, liaisons are supposed to conduct weekly visits, and to restrict themselves to monitoring both the implementation of the Redesign plan and the support and technical assistance being provided to the school by the district and BOE.[27]

We surveyed principals and teachers in Groups 1-3 about the roles the SED liaisons played in their schools. Not surprisingly, principals in Groups 1-3 found the liaison somewhat more helpful than teachers in Groups 1-3 in every category of assistance. (The numbers were too small to differentiate answers by Groups.) Although combining teachers' and principals' responses may somewhat under-represent the presence of the SED liaison in the schools, interesting variations in responses occurred by whether the respondent was in an elementary, middle or secondary school.

Table 1.4
Group 1-3 Staff Perceptions of SED Liaisons Roles

Our SED liaison has:	Elementary School (n=71)	Middle School (n=19)	High School (n=8)	Total (n=98)
attended meetings	73.2%	73.7%	37.5%	70.4%
held capacity-building sessions for school staff	21.1%	26.3%	12.5%	21.4%
helped the school develop grants	14.1%	10.5%		12.2%
linked the school with resources	46.5%	26.3%	25.0%	40.8%
enhanced the school's knowledge of the SURR process	57.7%	52.6%	37.5%	55.1%
met with district officials and encouraged them to support the school	45.1%	31.6%	25.0%	40.8%
limited their role to monitoring	22.5%	15.8%	25.0%	21.4%
Don't know	8.5%	21.1%	37.5%	13.3%

As the above table suggests, elementary school staff perceived the SED liaison as performing more roles than did middle school and high school staff; high school staff consistently perceived themselves as receiving relatively little assistance from SURR liaisons. The most frequent type of assistance reported for all groups was improving schools' knowledge of the SURR process. Yet even the results from this category indicate that high school staff perceived themselves as less well served than other school levels. We tested whether this was an anomaly created by the disproportionate number of upstate SURR schools at the high school level, but there was little distinction between upstate and New York City high school responses, suggesting that high school staff generally perceived themselves as more poorly served by the SURR liaisons.

Even in Groups 1-3 schools, less than a quarter of all SURR respondents report that their liaison limited themselves to monitoring. This is borne out by conversations with SURR liaisons and observations in SURR schools. Although some liaisons were previously Title I monitors, and feel comfortable monitoring for compliance, others were trained in technical assistance and want to support school improvement efforts by providing information and access to resources.

Nevertheless, the State Commissioner of Education has made clear that SURR schools must be periodically monitored. Moreover, as the SED has exerted greater accountability, particularly as it places more SURR schools under immediate Corrective Action, it has relied increasingly on the liaisons to act as monitors.

The Problem of Monitoring. Once a school has been identified for Registration Review, only improved test scores can get the school removed from the SURR list. Despite this, schools' improvement plans are considered contractual, and SED monitoring in 1996-1997 was focused on assuring compliance with each school's CEP or Redesign plan. If a planned program or activity does not appear to be increasing student achievement, and the school would like to substitute another program or activity, the school's planning team is expected to revise the CEP or Redesign plan to reflect the change.

Liaison reporting has evolved over the years. New monitoring updates for SURR, Corrective Action, and Redesign schools, introduced in 1996-97, required liaisons to track the timeliness of the SURR schools' implementation of all activities proposed in their Comprehensive Education Plans and Redesign plans. Though relatively easy to fill out, the forms involved the liaisons in repetitive paperwork, which only rarely generated useful descriptions of the schools' activities, problems, and/or progress. In our IESP survey, 44 percent of all principals and nearly a third of all teachers thought that "some of their school improvement efforts" fell outside their plans. Because unplanned activities are not reported to SED and so cannot be monitored, this effects the SED's ability to understand how a school actually changes.

We think that the tensions generated by monitoring highlight a more serious problem: the contradiction of compliance-based monitoring in a performance-driven system. The 1996-97 SURR process asked schools identified as low-performing, and assumed to have serious deficiencies in capacity, to design plans for their improvement in a short time and under extreme duress. The SED then held them to these plans through compliance monitoring, as if only faithful implementation of a quickly devised plan, often drafted by the same staff that had produced significant school failure, could drive improvement. This emphasis on compliance may well *discourage* the rethinking, revising, and continual adaptation needed for genuine school improvement. Moreover, because the schools' ultimate SURR status is *not* determined by their adherence to their plans, but only by improvement on their test scores, compliance monitoring will not necessarily produce the results all SURR schools must strive for.

The SED has begun to rework the monitoring forms for the 1997-98 year. Early indications are that the new forms will be less onerous for SED liaisons and more useful to the schools. Directed to assessing the general functioning of a school as it moves towards improvement, the new forms suggest that mechanical implementation of the CEP will be less a focus of monitoring. Although schools will have to be informed of this shift, and some may initially respond with confusion, believing that their CEPs are no longer being taken "seriously," we applaud this new emphasis. Indeed, as we argue in chapter 4, we believe that carefully structured narrative reports, written by liaisons who also offer technical assistance, can provide the richest source of information on the changing nature of the SURR schools.

Summary and Recommendations

Several changes might strengthen the State Education Department's performance accountability system, while providing SURR schools with more of the assistance they need.

- Although the first year time-lines in the SURR process for newly-identified schools are currently constricted, the SED's Registration Review can be changed to improve the process. To enable new SURR schools and their districts to move swiftly to completing carefully constructed and more useful Comprehensive Education Plans and Corrective Action Plans, we suggest that:

1) the Self-Study be conducted as an on-going conversation by the school's planning group, and presented *orally* to the Registration Review visiting team;

2) at the end of the Registration Review visit, the visiting team present their findings *orally* to both the school's planning team and the whole school in sessions that allow sufficient time for both groups to absorb and discuss these findings. (The visitors should also eventually complete and send the school a written report.)

3) the school's planning team should begin *immediately* to work on the Comprehensive Education Plan (and the district on its Corrective Action Plan), using the oral findings of the Registration Review team.

- The SED should continue working with districts (and in New York City, with the BOE) to clarify district responsibilities for low-performing schools. Despite Corrective Action Plans, it remains too easy for districts to deny or deflect responsibility for policies that help create SURR schools, and to evade their accountability in

the SURR process. The SED should work with the BOE to develop strong sanctions, including withholding Title I funds, focused at districts whose policies exacerbate the problems of SURR schools, or who fail to take aggressive steps to help their low-performing schools.

- Although the SED must continuously assess the progress of SURR schools, and must ultimately exercise the option of school closure, the Registration Review Process is primarily a performance-based effort— ultimately, schools must find the ways to improve their own performance, with support from their districts and the SED. Although the Commissioner has stipulated that CEPs and CAPs will be monitored, we believe that intensive monitoring for compliance in a performance-based effort may hinder schools from taking ownership and responsibility for their own improvement. The SED has shown flexibility and intellectual vigor in continuing to improve its methods of tracking school progress; we suggest that, with the Commissioner's permission, the SED explore the utility and effectiveness of rich narrative reporting that helps to identify and direct the technical assistance and supports necessary to encourage school-by-school improvement.

- The nature of the improvement relationship between the SED and the individual SURR schools is primarily determined by the SED liaisons. These individuals, and the ways their roles are formulated, are critical to the usefulness of the support SURR schools receive, as well as the SED's effectiveness in identifying the schools and tracking their progress. We believe that SED liaisons will function more effectively if their roles are primarily structured to assess school capacity for change and offer the necessary technical assistance. This, in turn, requires intensive and careful observations to analyze how best to help the school improve.

- Capacity-building within the SED should focus on developing liaisons' ability to offer a wide range of technical assistance, including the analysis of school performance data, as well as to be astute observers and analyzers of school instruction and culture, so that they can produce the rich and informative narrative reports that would provide the SED with useful information on the culture, capacities and progress of SURR schools.

II. SURR Schools and their Community and System-Based Stresses

> School districts and SURR schools vary greatly in their capacity and readiness to engage in programs of self-improvement. Differentiated support, assistance, and intervention strategies must be a key component of the Regents effort.
>
> --Advisory Council to the New York State Board of Regents Subcommittee on Low-Performing Schools[28]

The link between schools' low-performance and community and systemic stresses was noted by the Education Priority Panel, which in 1988 reported that "a disproportionate number of unlicensed teachers, who have the least classroom experience, are assigned to the most challenging schools."[29] More recently, the 1994 report of the Advisory Council to the New York State Board of Regents Subcommittee on Low-Performing Schools noted that, "Savage inequalities persist in the support we provide to students in our State." The report argued that "SURR schools are located in some of our nation's most underserved communities. To succeed, students and their families from these communities need to be provided with a comprehensive set of educational, health, and social services."[30]

In 1996-97, the State Education Department introduced new criteria for identifying a school as under Registration Review, allowing schools to be identified for being "*poor learning environments.*" Among the components of a poor learning environment were "conditions that threaten the health, safety, or educational welfare" of a school's students. The SED included such conditions as a high rate of student absenteeism, inordinate levels of violence, an excessive number of suspensions, and a significant percentage of uncertified teachers."[31]

Although the SED has yet to identify a school for Registration Review because of being a "poor learning environment," we believe that this is an important step, enabling the State to identify additional SURR schools, as well as improve supports to them. As this chapter demonstrates, SURR schools face significant community and systemic stresses. Analyzing them is important, not to excuse school failure, but to pinpoint where diversified assistance, as well as strong interventions, may be necessary to increase the likelihood of improvement.

The following findings are based on New York City data about school stresses:

- SURR schools are likely to be burdened by both community and school system stresses that reduce their ability to produce acceptable achievement;
- Other non-SURR low-performing schools suffer from similar stresses, and so are at risk for becoming SURR;
- There are sizable cohorts of students from SURR elementary schools who move to SURR middle schools and SURR high schools, and whose entire educational experience is spent in low-performing schools;
- Since SURR schools, at least in New York City, differ on a number of key demographic and school factors, different interventions, capacity-building strategies and other institutional supports may be required to generate significant improvement.

Our analysis is based on the 1995-96 New York City Annual School Reports data for elementary and middle schools. Although we do not have comparable State data on which to generalize findings beyond New York City, we believe that the large number of SURR and other low-performing schools in the City justifies our city-specific approach. We think that further analyses will reveal that most of our findings apply throughout the State.

To conduct our analysis, we divided New York City schools into three groups based on their performance on standardized reading tests: SURR schools (84 schools), other low-performing schools (298 schools), and high-performing schools (163 schools). (A middle group, consisting of 374 schools, was also identified. However, to highlight the contrasts, we exclude this group from the discussions that follow.)

The breakout of the three groups is as follows:

SURR elementary schools-	59 schools
SURR middle schools-	25 schools
	84 schools
Other low-performing elementary schools-	199 schools
Other low-performing middle schools-	99 schools
	298 schools
High-performing elementary schools-	139 schools
High-performing middle schools-	24 schools
	163 schools

At the two poles of our analysis, schools are quite distinct: in schools serving low-performing students, 93 percent of the students receive free lunch, and 98 percent are

students of color; by contrast, in schools serving high-performing students, 37 percent of the students receive free lunch, and 52 percent are students of color[1]

Community-Based Stresses

All NYC SURR schools are located in low-income neighborhoods. Along with poverty, the communities which house SURR schools face related stresses such as high rates of homelessness, and poor child health (as indicated by high rates of asthma) which place added strain on schools and learning within the classroom. To illustrate, the four following maps display geographic relationships between community stresses and SURR schools. These relationships suggest areas for further investigation, possible intervention, and differentiated improvement strategies, especially if SURR schools are to build their capacity to become genuinely effective schools for all their students.

Map 2.1, New York City SURR Schools, illustrates the geographic distribution of all SURR schools in New York City.

Map 2.2, Poverty and New York City SURR Schools, maps poverty in New York City by zip code, and shows the geographic distribution of SURR schools. SURR schools are clearly concentrated in areas with high rates of poverty: central Brooklyn, Harlem, and the south Bronx. While not all school districts have a SURR school, areas marked by high poverty have multiple SURR schools.

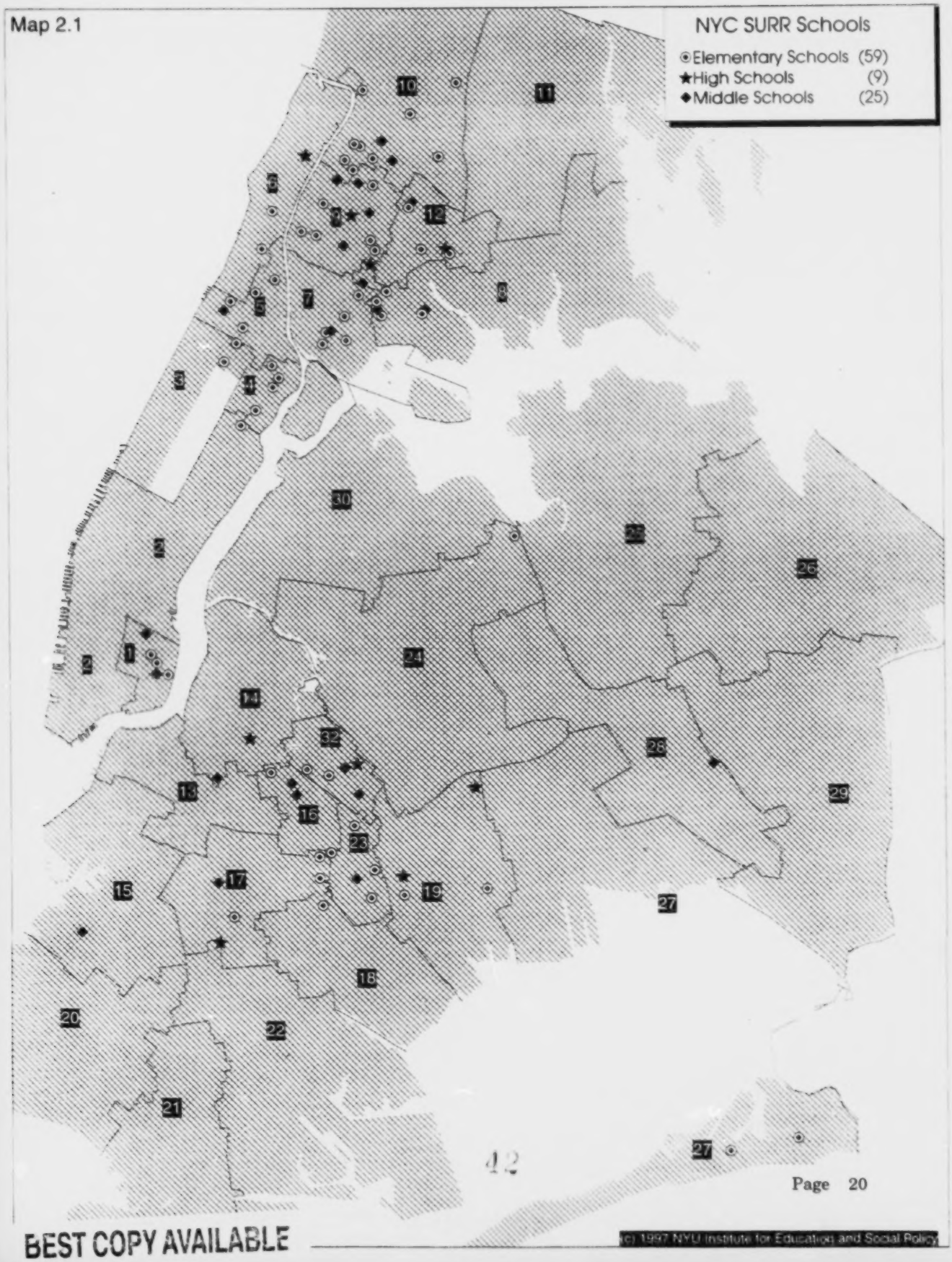
Map 2.3, Shelters and New York City SURR Elementary Schools, illustrates the geographical relationship between Tier II shelters, which house homeless families, and SURR elementary schools. Most homeless shelters are located near SURR elementary schools, and most SURR elementary schools have one or more homeless shelters in close physical proximity. Although in some cases shelters may only supply a small proportion of the schools' students, shelter children moving in and out of schools throughout the year can place extra stresses on SURR schools.

In other cases, the shelters do supply SURR schools with enough students to create significant problems of mobility and family dislocation. To test the effect of shelters on mobility, we sampled both high mobility SURR schools and other SURR schools; in most cases, high mobility schools in close proximity to shelters were impacted by significant numbers of shelter students (12-35% of the student body).

[1] The total test result distribution for elementary students ranged from 6% scoring at/above grade level to 90.5% scoring at/above grade level. Comparison groups were defined as follows: SURR as identified by the State; other low-performing schools, 6.5% to 34.5% of students at/above grade level in reading 1996; high-performing schools more than 62.7% to 90.5% at/above grade level in reading 1996. The total test result distribution for middle school students ranged from 1.9% scoring at/above grade level to 98.4% scoring at/above grade level; SURR as identified by the State; other low-performing 1.9% to 33.6% of students at/above grade level in reading 1996; high-performing schools 67.6% to 98.4% of students at/above grade level in reading 1996.

Map 2.4, New York City SURR Schools and Asthma Hospitalizations, illustrates the relationship between SURR schools and the prevalence of asthma as indicated by number of New York City hospitalizations. Since asthma affects children disproportionately, the map indicates that SURR schools serve a disproportionate share of students with compromised health. Children with asthma generally have poor attendance, which affects their learning and slows down the learning of their classmates, indicating a need for school supports in sharing information with parents as well as establishing school-based health clinics. According to the most recent information available from the SED, in 1994-95 55 SURR schools (63%) had school-based health clinics, a commendable but still limited percentage. Conversely, all 20 schools that had been removed from SURR had school-based health clinics. Given the prevalence of asthma and other diseases in high poverty areas, we recommend that all schools have health clinics.

Map 2.1



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(c) 1997 NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy

Map 2.2

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Map 2.3

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Map 2.4

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Systemic Stresses

As the SED has made clear, some stresses that may depress student achievement stem from the public school system itself. We call these systemic stresses; many of these stresses are the result of decisions made at more than one level within the school system. The SED has identified the preponderance of uncertified teachers as part of a "poor learning environment"; we also include lack of professional training, teacher inexperience, and irregular teacher attendance within our analysis of systemic stresses. Similar stresses can stem from principals who are inexperienced, poorly prepared, or are frequently absent from their school. Three of the 24 Registration Review reports for 1996-97 mention high principal turnover in the SURR school analyzed, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the problem may be more frequent; however, we could not identify data on principal turnover and were unable to construct our own data set during the limited time period of our first-year study. Finally, there are student demographic stresses that stem from disproportionate numbers of special education, Limited English Proficient (LEP), or highly mobile students in any given school. We include student demographics in systemic stresses because we believe that special education assignments are decisions made by local administrators, and that high concentrations of LEP or mobile students in any one school may also result from local administrative and policy decisions that can be reconsidered.

Comparative Analyses of Stresses and Performance. To study associations between these stresses and school performance, we disaggregated 1996 data on reading test results for all New York City elementary and middle schools. We then compared the prevalence of these stresses among three groups of elementary and middle schools: SURR schools, other low-performing schools, and high-performing schools.

By determining the mean proportions for teacher and student demographic stresses within these groups, and testing for statistically significant differences, we found similarities among SURR and other low-performing schools. On most stresses, SURR and other low-performing schools differed surprisingly from the high-performing group, at both the elementary school level, and at the middle school level (although data for all stresses were not available).

Elementary Grades - Teacher Stresses

- Nearly 30 percent of the teachers at SURR schools (29.4%) and over a quarter at other low-performing schools (25.9%) are neither fully licensed nor permanently assigned. By contrast, only 7.6 percent of the teachers at the high-performing schools are not fully licensed or permanently assigned. (The SURR proportion is statistically higher than the other low-performing schools group.)

- One third or more of the teachers at SURR schools (35.1%) and other low-performing schools (33.3%) have less than five years teaching experience. By contrast, under a fourth (23.7%) of the teachers at the high-performing schools have less than five years experience.

- Approximately 30% of the teachers at SURR schools (30.7%) and other low-performing schools (30.9%) have no advanced degrees; at the high-performing schools, only 18.1 percent of the teachers have no advanced degrees.

- Teachers in SURR schools and other low-performing schools are absent more often (7.5 days/year) than those in high-performing schools (6.4 days/year). This is a 10% higher absentee rate.

Elementary Grades - Student Policy Stresses

- SURR schools have more than twice as many students in self-contained special education classes than high-performing schools (8.1% vs. 3.6%). While not quite as striking, other low-performing schools also have proportionally more students in self-contained special education classes (6.6% vs. 3.6%).

- SURR schools have over twice as many LEP students as high-performing schools (26.3% vs. 12.6%). Other low-performing schools also have a significantly higher proportion of LEP students (21.5% vs. 12.6%).

- SURR schools (12.9%) and other low-performing schools (9.7%) have a significantly higher percent of students who have not been in school for an entire year, than do high-performing schools (5.9%).

Middle Grades - Teacher Stresses

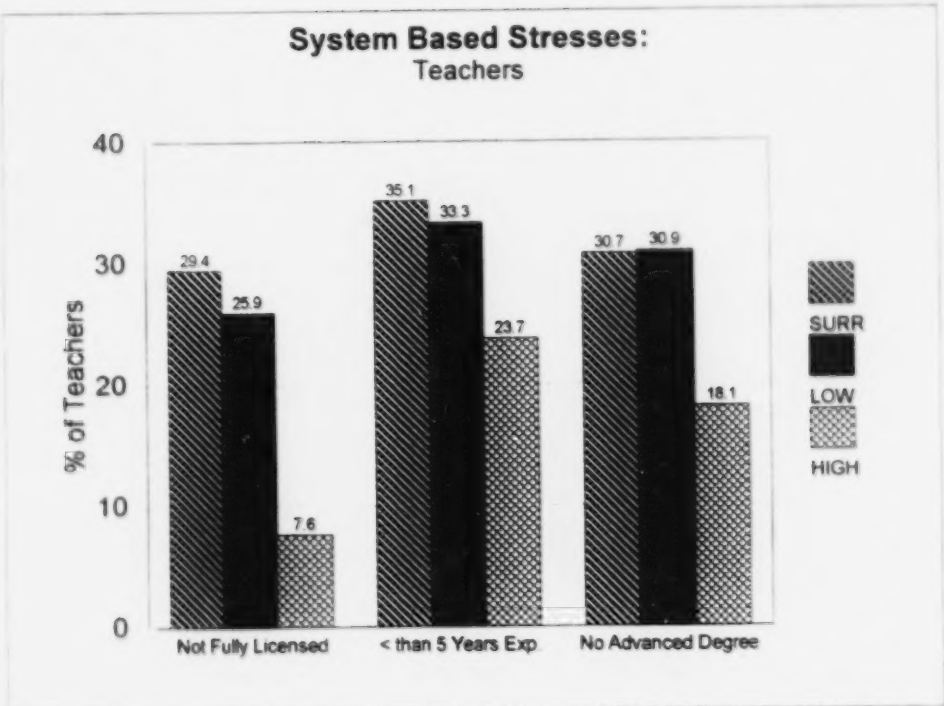
- Over a third of the teachers at SURR schools (33.7%), and 28.8 percent of the teachers in other low-performing schools are not fully licensed or permanently assigned. This is true for only 13.6 percent of the teachers at the high-performing schools.

- Over 30% of the teachers at SURR schools (30.5%) and other low-performing schools (31.9%) have less than five years teaching experience. But only 26.1 percent of the teachers at the high-performing schools have less than five years experience.

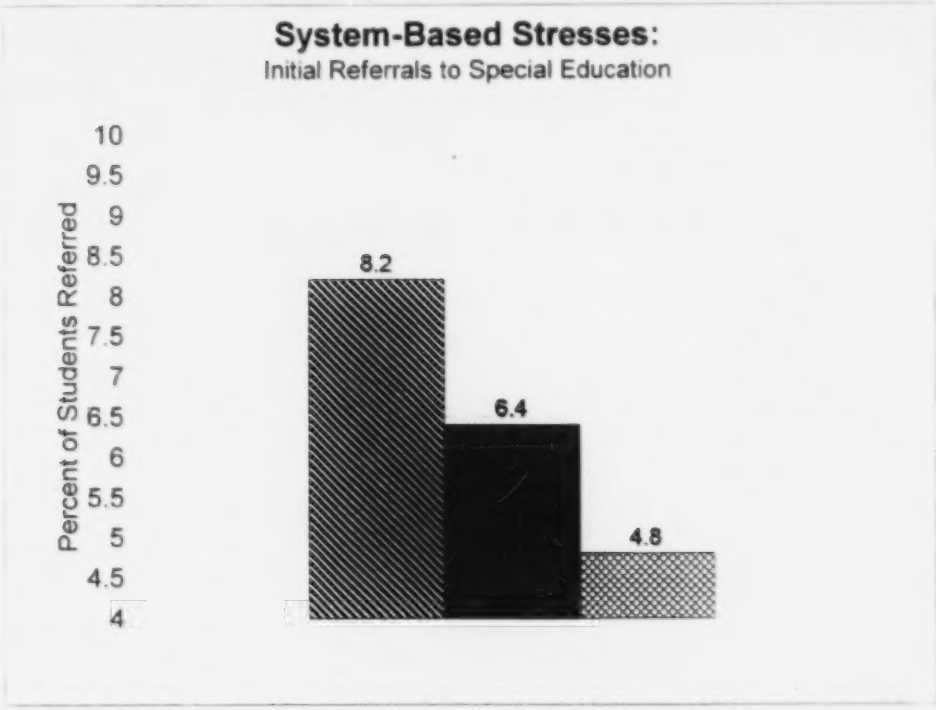
The Accumulation of Stresses

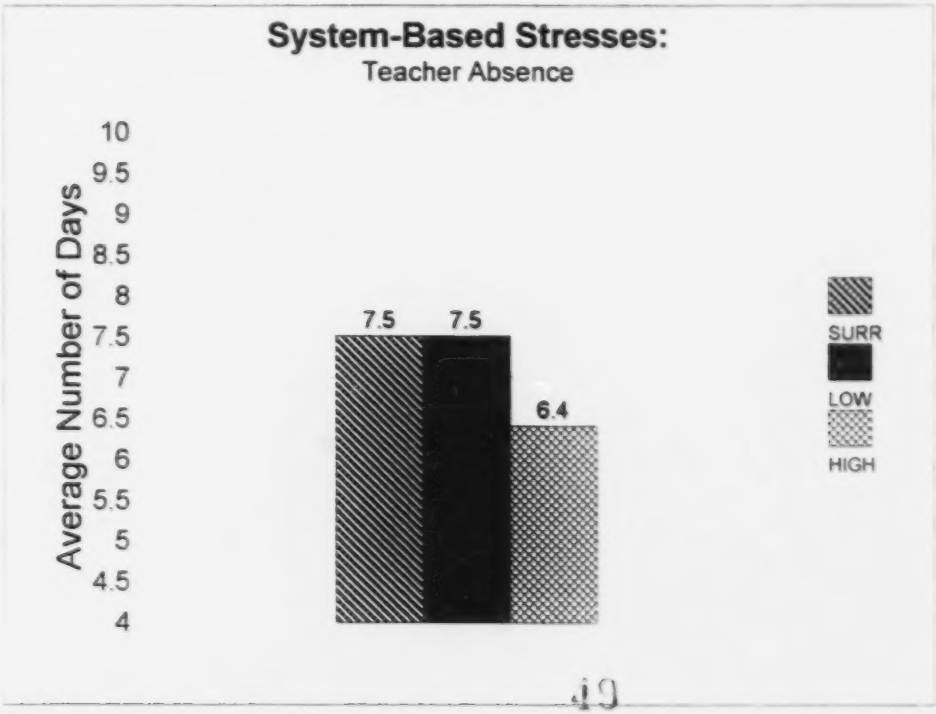
The results of our analyses show a strong relationship between the presence of systemic stresses and performance group status for every measure at the elementary level, and for most measures at the middle school level: the higher the stress level, the lower the performance group status. The similarities among SURR and other low-performing schools, and the differences between those groups and high-performing schools are displayed in the following graphs: 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8.

Graph 2.5

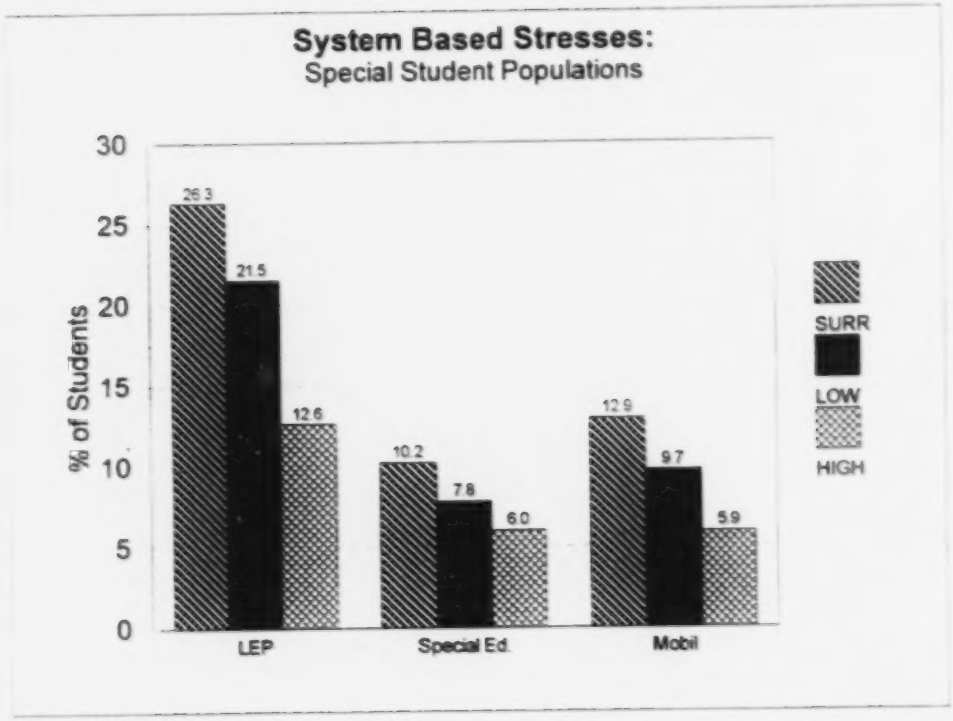


Graph 2.6 (top) & Graph 2.7(bottom)





Graph 2.8


System Based Stresses:
Special Student Populations
% of Students
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
26.3
21.5
12.6
10.2
7.8
6.0
12.9
9.7
5.9
LEP
Special Ed.
Mobil
SURR
LOW
HIGH

As the preceding discussion and graphs demonstrate, there is a group of low-performing schools whose stresses are very similar to those affecting SURR schools. Therefore the pool of potential SURR schools may well be much larger than those schools currently identified. Even if low-performing schools have slightly higher test scores than SURR schools in a given year, many of these schools may well subsequently become SURR. Therefore, assistance to such schools may be useful *before* they are identified as SURR. Poor students, students of color, and immigrant students may start their school careers at a disadvantage, but they also receive consistently inferior school resources compared to their more advantaged peers. The SED could usefully begin efforts at the State and BOE levels to explore how poorly performing schools could receive a fairer share of necessary resources, particularly qualified teachers.

SURR Corridors

Feeder patterns create additional stresses on SURR schools. Although feeder patterns are caused in part by neighborhood geography, they are also subject to local administrative and policy decisions and can be changed. A review of available feeder pattern data shows that many SURR elementary schools send students to SURR middle schools, and that some non-SURR (but low-performing) middle schools are populated by large groups of students who have previously attended SURR elementary schools. The progression from one SURR school to another, or to another school where the majority of students come from SURR schools, produces a SURR corridor through which some students will travel throughout their tenure in New York City public schools.

Examples of this corridor effect demonstrate great local variation among New York City Community School Districts (CSD).

- In CSD 1, two of the three SURR schools send half or more of their students to the same SURR middle school. The other SURR school sends 63 percent of its students to one non-SURR middle school.

- In CSD 2, more than half the students from one SURR elementary school attend the same middle school (even though there are four others in the district).

- In CSD 9, 5 of the 9 middle schools are designated as SURR schools. Most of the students from the 7 SURR elementary schools within the district attend one of the district's SURR middle schools.

- CSD 23 has two SURR elementary schools that send half or more of their students to the one SURR middle school in the district.

- Similarly, CSD 32 has two SURR schools that send more than two-thirds of their students to the three SURR middle schools (but hardly any to the other three non-SURR middle schools in the district).

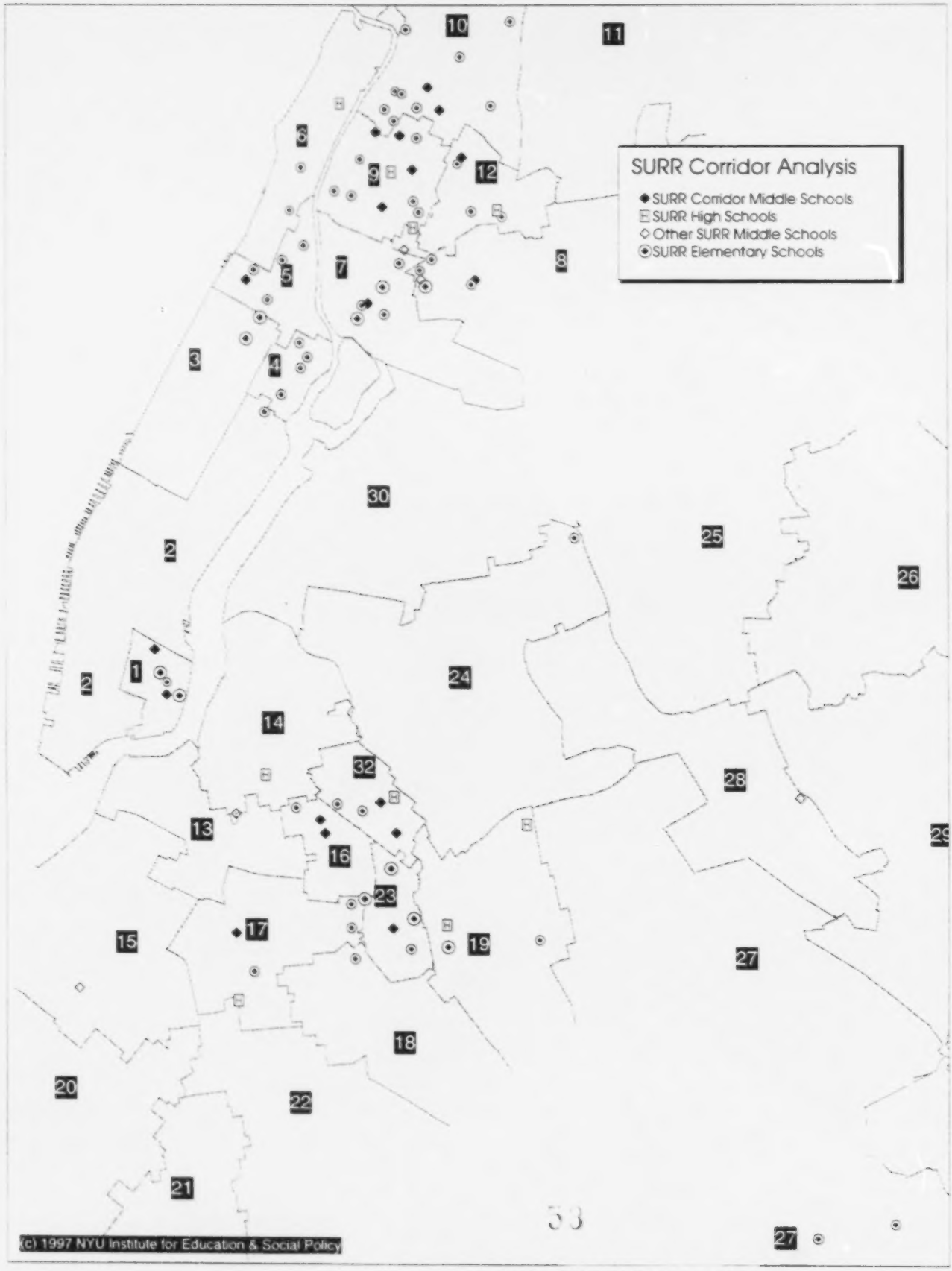
We analyzed SURR elementary school data to discover how such SURR corridors may produce additional system-based stress on SURR middle schools. We found that SURR schools at the initiating end of the corridor have lower student attendance (86.4% vs. 91.4%) than high-performing schools, and substantially more initial referrals to special education than high-performing schools (8.2% - SURR vs. 4.8% high). About three-quarters of the students at SURR schools (76.3%) were not reading at/above grade level in 1996, compared to only about one-quarter of the students at high-performing schools. All these factors clearly influence the potential of middle schools to avoid the SURR designation, as well as to deliver effective instruction.

In many of these cases, community school districts could redesign their feeder patterns to eliminate these corridors of failure; this kind of redesign is within the province of district administration. Yet such redesign is not easily accomplished: rezoning efforts usually generate strong opposition from teachers and parents in targeted schools. However, because we believe that such a rezoning effort is worthwhile, we recommend that SED work with BOE to identify corridors of failure and potential sites for within-district rezoning. This joint effort might also explore the provision of incentives for breaking up these corridors of failure.

Map 2.9, New York City SURR Corridor Analysis, displays the SURR corridors and shows that, with few exceptions, SURR middle schools are surrounded by SURR elementary schools. Although high school receiving patterns are more difficult to analyze, since high schools draw students from wider areas, most SURR high schools are also surrounded by SURR middle schools. More specifically, a limited data set provided by the SED offers some insight into the problem of SURR high school student distribution.

- Taft High School received 79% of its students from District 9, a district in which 4 of 8 middle schools are SURR.

- James Monroe High School received 30% of its students from District 8, where 3 of the 9 middle schools are SURR, and 50% of its students from District 12, in which one of the six middle schools are SURR.[32]


SURR Corridor Analysis
SURR Corridor Middle Schools
SURR High Schools
Other SURR Middle Schools
SURR Elementary Schools
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Towards a Typology of SURR Schools

Our data analysis suggests that a range of different factors contribute to the low performance of SURR schools. Based on an analysis of the New York City annual school reports data set, we have provisionally identified four distinct types of SURR schools:

- high immigrant, high LEP elementary schools (12 schools);
- high mobility elementary schools (13 schools);
- underutilized elementary schools (12 schools);
- middle schools that are in a SURR corridor (19 schools).

While these categories need refinement and do not define or imply causality, they indicate some key school types, and suggest differentiations for which both the SED and districts could develop more targeted interventions.

High Immigrant/High LEP Elementary Schools. Twelve SURR elementary schools (out of 59) serve disproportionate numbers of foreign-born students who arrived in the U.S. within the last three years and have limited English proficiency. The schools in this category have student populations that are on average 50 percent LEP, with 12.3 percent of the students arriving in the US within the last three years (compared to only 20% LEP and 5.2% recent immigrants among all other SURR schools). Compared to all other SURR elementary schools, these schools have larger total enrollments (992 compared to 697 for other schools), and significantly higher rates of building utilization (127.6 % compared to only 91.3% for all other SURR elementary schools). Students at these schools also have slightly better average daily attendance than their peers at other SURR schools, but their teachers have higher average absences (8.3 days as compared to 7.3 days in the rest of the SURR elementary schools).

School-improvement strategies for these schools might begin by decreasing the severe overcrowding, a condition that could be included within the SED's definition of a poor learning environment. Once there is sufficient space for more effective learning, long-term capacity-building strategies should be targeted to raising achievement among linguistically and culturally diverse students.

High Mobility Elementary Schools. There are 13 SURR elementary schools with particularly high proportions of mobile students. Only 80.9 percent of the students in these schools have been in their same school for the entire year (compared to 90.8% of students in the same school all year in other SURR elementary schools). SURR schools with high student mobility also have proportionately more new teachers (27.2% at "mobile" schools compared to 16.7% at all other SURR

elementary schools), fewer teachers with a masters degree or more advanced study, proportionately more students who are receiving special education services, and student average daily attendance that is particularly low at the elementary level (85.2%).

These schools might well be helped to address the needs of students who transfer in, or who attend school for a more limited duration, as well as the instructional needs of other students who are likely to be affected by the high student turnover rates. Capacity-building in these schools may require increasing internal stability among the staff and finding ways to attract and retain more qualified teachers.

Underutilized Elementary Schools. In a school system that suffers from overcrowding (the average citywide utilization rate is 103 percent), except for the high immigrant/high LEP SURR schools, SURR elementary schools tend to have somewhat lower utilization rates (98.7 percent). However, 12 of the SURR elementary schools (the bottom 20% in utilization) have inordinately low utilization rates of under 76 percent. These schools are also characterized by disproportionately high numbers of African-American students (51.9% compared to 38.9% among the rest of SURR elementary schools), slightly more special education students (9.6% compared to 7.8% at other SURR schools), higher proportions of new teachers (more than one quarter of the staff have been in the school less than two years, compared to 17% at other SURR schools), and especially low student attendance (85.6%) and achievement (only 20.2% of the students were reading at/above grade level in 1996).

Capacity-building and support in these schools might be aimed at taking advantage of the additional space to create more innovative programs for low achievers, while seeking also to increase internal stability among the teaching staff.

SURR Corridor Middle Schools. Our analysis indicates that 19 of the 25 SURR middle schools are SURR corridor schools—that is, many of their students attended SURR elementary schools, and therefore had their initial education in a low-achieving environment. These middle schools are also characterized by slightly higher proportions of LEP students and students in special education. While these schools have a much smaller proportion of teachers who are fully licensed/permanently assigned, they tend to have stable teaching populations--teachers who have remained in the schools without appropriate licenses.

Building capacity and support in these schools could most usefully start by changing district-level feeder pattern policies. If students from SURR elementary schools could be more equitably distributed, improvement strategies could begin to address the students who enter middle school with serious skills deficiencies. In addition, these SURR middle schools should strengthen their teaching forces to include more teachers who are fully licensed and permanently assigned (high achieving middle schools have more than 85% of teachers fully licensed). Programs to assist teachers to gain their licenses or higher degrees would also be helpful.

Summary and Recommendations

Currently, the de-registration of SURR schools is based predominantly on test score gain. Although the SED has created an additional range of indicators for a "poor learning environment," these indicators have not yet been used to identify schools under Registration Review. Identifying schools primarily by test scores limits the diagnostic power of SED's assessment and can create the impression that the causes of school failure are uniform and universally school-based, and therefore remediable by assistance directed largely at school-level staff development and instructional improvement efforts.

While all SURR schools are low-performing, our analysis indicates that low performance may well have different causes; some entirely within the school, and others the result of district administrative responsibility. Proceeding from identification of low performance to investigating differential causes would be a useful step to creating more effectively targeted assistance.

Using existing New York City BOE data, we have preliminarily located about half of all SURR schools within one or more of these categories: high immigrant/high LEP elementary schools; high mobility elementary schools; underutilized elementary schools; and SURR corridor middle-schools. Each of these school types has been deeply impacted by, and in some cases created by, district policies.

Success in these four types of schools may well necessitate changes in such district-level policies as: re-assigning teachers so that SURR schools do not have disproportionate numbers of inexperienced and unlicensed teachers; assisting teachers in obtaining advanced training and licensing; reducing overcrowding, particularly in high-immigrant schools; rethinking and reorganizing special education; and changing feeding patterns so that one or two middle schools do not take the entire burden of students' poor preparation in SURR elementary schools.

Even if such district-level policies were changed, each of these school types will need different interventions to become high-achieving schools. For example, the high immigrant/high LEP schools will need curriculum and instructional strategies that focus on students whose first language is not English-- an under-stressed area in the current staff development programs offered to SURR schools. The high-mobility schools will need strategies that help incorporate mobile students into the classrooms without sacrificing instructional time for stable students, and that build stability and commitment to the school among students, parents, and teachers.

- Our analysis also suggests that State, BOE and local efforts targeted to a large group of low-performing schools that are not yet designated as SURR, should be expanded to prevent achievement in these schools from dropping to unacceptable levels.

- To decrease the likelihood that students will travel through a SURR corridor throughout their public school tenure, the SED should work with

the BOE to get districts to redesign feeder patterns to eliminate these corridors of failure.

- In those instances where a school's low performance seems closely linked to district administrative policies, we suggest that SED and BOE collaborate to develop strong sanctions to motivate district action. In school where the cost of investment in improvement efforts may be too great, we suggest that SED consider immediately closing the school, rather than subjecting students to the current three-year waiting period.

- The SED should work with the BOE to explore how schools serving low-income students of color can be staffed with as dedicated and highly trained teachers as those serving middle-class white students. The SED and the BOE might suggest legislative changes to ensure that low-performing schools do not continue to suffer these "savage inequalities."

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III. Diagnosing the Causes of School Failure: The Registration Review Visit

> The point of reviewing is for schools to learn that looking closely and critically and being looked at closely and critically are okay. It is for schools to learn that seeing and making public what you see are also okay. Only with safeguards is this learning possible, however.
>
> --Jacqueline Ancess, *Outside / Inside, Inside / Outside*[33]

Once a school is identified as SURR, the Registration Review visit is the next major intervention organized by the State Education Department (SED). The Registration Review has evolved over the years, as the SED has made annual attempts to improve training, preparation and support for teams visiting schools. As of 1996-1997, the SED views the Registration Review visit as a critical diagnostic effort, and "a resource, planning and program audit," and expects the visit to:

- assess the school's total culture in terms of its capacity to deliver effective teaching and learning;
- investigate the effectiveness of the school's instructional program;
- identify classroom, school, and district practices that must be changed to improve student achievement, and specifically recommend making those changes;
- assess, validate, or critique the school's Self-Study Report.[34]

The diagnostic report produced as a result of the Registration Review visit is expected to provide targeted recommendations on which the school can base its plan for improvement. This report is also expected to provide an external assessment of the resources and support needed by the school, from its district and from the SED, to implement the recommended changes.

The Registration Review visit is based on SED's assumption that low-performing schools require an objective analysis of their individual problems and

strengths by an external review. Therefore, the visiting teams are staffed by practitioners from other schools and districts in New York City and across the state. Under optimum conditions, such a team of external practitioners can provide a critical analysis of a school's operating assumptions, expectations, overall culture, administrative organization, management style and instructional practices.

The constraints on an external review include limitations in time, access, and training, which can limit team understanding of a school's organization, culture, and outcomes, and consequently their accurate assessments and useful recommendations. In addition, since low-performing schools are at times resentful of their designation, negative attitudes toward the Registration Review team can complicate the task of persuading the school to validate, internalize, and use the team's findings and recommendations.

The IESP participated in five of twenty-four Registration Review visits to New York City schools newly identified as SURR in 1996-1997, including three high schools and two elementary schools. Shadowing team members during the Review visits, the IESP watched interviews and classroom observations conducted by team members, engaged in the review of school level and district data, and were present for the drafting and presentation of the report given to the schools and their districts.

Team Composition, Responsibilities, and Functions

Registration Review teams are comprised of eight to twelve members, mostly administrators and teachers, led by a BOCES Superintendent. Teams also include a SED liaison, who is responsible for preparing the school for the visit, and a parent representative. In addition, some districts provide a representative assigned to SURR schools within their district.

The Upstate/Downstate Mix. Upstate, teams are selected by the BOCES Superintendent from his or her district; within the upstate teams, the only member from New York City is the parent representative. New York City teams consist of the BOCES Superintendent, as well as two other individuals selected by the Superintendent as specialists in the instructional area(s) identified by SED as low-performing. NYC teams also consist of representatives from the City's major educational constituencies: the Board of Education, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA).

The inclusion of subject area specialists, usually in Language Arts or Mathematics, provides a critical resource that expands overall team capacity. However, upstate participants are not utilized as effectively as they might be. On all of our visits, one of the upstate members functioned almost exclusively as secretary to the Team Leader, depriving the team of important observational skills and subject area expertise. The inclusion of constituency representatives such as the UFT and CSA could provide a potentially strong team resource; however, our shadowing

suggests that they are less consistently useful, at times becoming unreflective advocates for their constituency or the school.

On New York City Registration Review visits, the team's mix of upstate and local members seems to provide a useful dynamic. Upstate members often challenge what locals take for granted, such as inadequate or poorly maintained physical conditions. Often local complacency is interpreted by upstate members as low expectations. Conversely, upstate members often need explanations that force locals to be explicit about administrative, managerial, fiscal and instructional practices that are particular to the nation's largest school system.

The fruitfulness of the local/outsider mix suggests that adding New York City practitioners to upstate Registration Review teams might well provide a similar combination of useful contributions. It would also provide New York City educators with much needed experiences in other school systems.

District Representatives. While the District representative is not an official member of Registration Review teams, on several of our visits, the liaison representing the district office functioned as an advocate for the district rather than the school, defending the district from findings suggesting insufficient resource provision or support to the school. "They'll kill me if you put that in," one district liaison argued in successfully excluding a finding. The responsibility for structuring the participation of District Representatives in discussions pertaining to district issues falls upon the Team Leader, who must be ready to limit the contributions of the District Representatives to needed information about the school and district.

SED Liaisons. As currently constructed, the role of the SED liaison is also problematic. SED liaisons vary widely in how much they know about the school prior to the Registration Review visit, and whether they see themselves as an ally or "critical friend" of the school, or someone who is looking for faults. These differences become troublesome, because the rest of the team knows much less about the school and is often unable to situate the information the liaison provides. Moreover, few of the team members we observed, including several team leaders, understood the components of the SURR process, or the role and function of the Registration Review visit within that process. The SED liaisons could remedy these shortcomings through an initial presentation that explains the liaisons' relation to the school, the SURR process and the functions of the Registration Review. This presentation might help increase the extent of team trust, and it would certainly help to clarify the role of the SED in the Registration Review visits.

The Parent Representative. Our shadowing indicated that the role played by most parent representatives is weak. Lacking the daily experience of practitioners, the parent representatives we observed were reduced to passive team members during team discussions. In one instance, a parent representative who had been silent for two days, when finally faced with a parent who had come to be

interviewed, acted quite censoriously, rather than trying to understand what the parent wanted to explain about parent involvement in the school. Additional team and parent participant training would help parent members contribute more broadly to discussions as well as inform other team members of how to incorporate the parents more fully into the team process.

Team Leadership. Team leadership is critical to an effective Registration Review visit. Our limited observations suggest that effective team leadership is too dependent on individual capacities. In one school, a new team leader, on his first Registration Review visit, skillfully led discussion and directed team activities. This team leader also took the time to brief the principal about the team's initial findings to help reduce anxieties about surprises during the final presentation to the school staff. Conversely, an experienced team leader provided virtually no guidance to the team, and during the exit conference to district personnel, lost his place while reading the findings, and began to nervously ad-lib findings which were not part of the team's report.

This disparity in effective leadership may not be widespread, but it suggests the need for specific team leadership preparation. The SED might profitably establish a process for evaluating team leadership to ensure the continuing strength of this position.

Race/Ethnicity. We found a striking lack of relationship between the race and ethnicity of Registration Review team members and the student composition of the schools reviewed. In one school with almost 100% students of color, all the team members, save one, were white. In another school with 25% LEP students and 65% students of Spanish origin, only one team member spoke Spanish. In the best instances, this lack of diversity may not be harmful. The African-American principal of an all-black school maintained that she had not learned anything she did not already know from the Registration Review visit, but reported berating her staff, "it takes a bunch of white folks to come in and tell it to us like it is." In other cases, all-white, all English-speaking teams contributed to problems in assessing classroom instruction and communicating with students, and increased the tendency of the school to dismiss the team's findings as failures to understand the knotty problems they face.

Team Preparation

A one day training session is provided by the SED for each of the participants in Registration Review visits. At this time, team roles and expectations should be clearly articulated to assure that team members' expertise are effectively focused and incorporated into the review process.

In addition, team members are supposed to receive a range of SED-prepared materials prior to the school visit; unfortunately, the inclusiveness of these materials appears to vary widely. In our experience, the most comprehensive packets included:

-The SED's Registration Review Process Guidebook
-The school's Self-Study
-The District's Mission Statement
-District Directory and Profile
-Annual School Report and State Report Card
-School Feeder Patterns
-Analysis of test scores by grade
-Schools' staff listing and organization chart
-Attendance Profiles

However, our shadowing indicated critical omissions in several schools, particularly in the provision of adequate data about school performance and school staffing. All the teams we observed found it necessary to acquire data and other descriptive materials upon arrival at the school and throughout the Review visit. Equally important, many team members received the materials too late to read them, or simply did not review the materials before the visit.

The Self-Study. The New York State Education Department requires all schools identified as SURR to engage in a Self-Study prior to the Registration Review visits. The Self-Study is intended to help low-performing schools assess their academic performance and their organizational and instructional needs, as well as to provide the Registration Review team with "detailed information about the relationships among classroom practices, school environment and student performance."[35] Each school is to form a representative working group, including administrators, teachers, parents and students, to develop the Self-Study. The State also suggests that both a district representative and the SED liaison assigned to the school participate in the Self-Study process.

The SED provides several questions for schools to consider while developing their Self-Studies.

1) Who are we and what have we done?
2) What are we proud of about the school?
3) What factors contributed to the decline of student performance in the area(s) for which the school was identified?
4) What are the school's current plans to improve student achievement, particularly in the area(s) for which the school was identified?
5) What support and resources are provided by the district?
6) What additional resources and support services are needed to improve student achievement?

7) How will we conduct the Self-Study so that we can accurately answer these questions?[36]

Despite this SED guide, Self Studies appear to be largely descriptions of school demographics, test score results, and extenuating circumstances; some are actually self-promotion essays. Although several 1996-97 reports identified some key areas of weakness in their schools, such as staff and administrative instability or a disproportionate number of uncertified teachers, most reports did not explore any school or district practices that might have contributed to poor academic performance. Even more rarely did schools suggest ways to improve their instruction. Furthermore, schools' responses to question 4, about plans to improve student achievement, were too often unrelated to their answers to question 3 on the factors which had caused the school to be identified.

Both as starting points for a comprehensive planning process, and as information platforms to be used by the Registration Review teams, the Self-Studies do not appear very useful. Instead, we suggest that the school planning team focus their meetings prior to the Registration Review visit on a discussion of questions 3-7 and prepare an oral presentation of their answers to these questions for the visiting team. Such a presentation would facilitate a good beginning discussion, involving the school planning team in helping to analyze the school with these outside visitors.

The Allocation of Time. According to New York State Board of Regents guidelines, Registration Review visits should last four days, of which two days are to be spent observing classrooms and conducting observations and interviews within the school. The first day is to be devoted to introductory sessions at the district office and the school, and the fourth day is to be spent preparing and presenting the report to school and district staff.

The two days of observations and interviews are further constricted because the team's critical task is to complete the report. Although the report is not due at the SED until 15 business days after the visit, the team must make an oral presentation at the end of the visit, and all the team leaders we observed attempted to write the report within their structured visit. This creates an overriding production pressure on team members, who curtail observing classrooms and interviewing staff, students, and parents, to concentrate on drafting the report.

Although the IESP believes that an expanded time-frame for school visits would allow for more complex interaction between team members and schools, and ultimately produce a more useful report, we recognize the variety of constraints that influence the current process. Thus we suggest the following ammendations: Teams should spend the morning of the first day within the school, gaining an additional half-day of school observation and interviews; the district office should be visited the afternoon of the same day, after school is out. No time should be spent during school days creating a written report.

Analyzing the School

To ensure the validity of their report, all the teams we shadowed sacrificed in-depth classroom observations for observing as many classes and obtaining as many interviews as possible. This attempt at coverage is partly reinforced by the SED's *Guidebook for Reviewers* which asks teams to state the documents analyzed, interviews conducted, and classrooms observed.[37] Because teams are not equipped to justify choices analytically, many go for high numbers. One team reported visiting 79 separate classrooms and conducting 107 interviews!

The complex time pressures, combined with a lack of training in observation and analysis, also encourage teams to focus on obvious and readily identifiable signs of low performance. The teams we shadowed focused on the physical conditions of schools, class schedules, and the need for additional resources, rather than on more complex issues affecting teaching and learning. Understanding that a school had been cited for math and/or reading, team members looked for violations of the most commonly accepted evidence of good instruction-- a teacher forgetting to place the lesson plan on the board, the absence of a teacher aid to work with the lowest quartile students, or a disengaged class. In one school which was experimenting with new staffing patterns, the team criticized the failure to use pull-out instruction for poor readers. Except for the reflexive finding of low expectations, the more complex areas of overall school culture proved far more difficult for the teams to identify.

The teams we observed tended to emphasize administrative practice much more than the organization of instruction or classroom practice. In one high school, where overall school attendance was somewhat lower than the citywide average, actual classroom attendance was abysmal. Yet the team's discussion, and the resulting recommendations, focused on the problem of getting more students into school, and not on the even more serious problem of getting them to attend class once they are in the school.

In general, the teams we observed had little way of evaluating valid evidence of effective or ineffective practice. Team members tended too readily to accept as fact what they were told by school staff, the SED liaison, or the district representative. In one school, a subject area chair told team members that she sees each of her departmental teachers every morning for a brief daily review. Team members not only treated this information as fact, but included it as a report finding. However, the department had more than thirty teaching staff; if the chair spent only five minutes with each member, about three hours of her teaching day would have been consumed in staff review. In another school, team members were told by a teacher that the Teacher Center was rarely used, despite its rich range of instructional resources. The team's final report included a recommendation to "make more focused but broad-based use of the on-site Teacher Center." The team neither confirmed this finding with other teachers, nor explored why the Teacher Center was not utilized, if in fact, it was not.

To improve the observation and interviewing skills of the Registration Review team, we suggest that the SED might profitably incorporate the level of training that School Quality Review teams used to receive in determining evidence of practice.

The Exit Conference

Time pressures severely limit the effectiveness of the reporting-out process to the school and the district. Although the teams we observed made efforts to present their reports to as many school and district staff members as possible, and most schools rearranged their schedules to accommodate the reporting-out, presentations were often perfunctory. Since the reports were rarely situated within the entire SURR process, school and district staffs were often unclear about where the recommendations were to lead, or what the school or district was required to do next. Teams did not anticipate that the exit conference might generate serious questioning. When school staff pointed to limitations of available school resources and asked what additional resources the district and SED might make available, the team leaders seemed at a loss to answer, and were unprepared to engage school staff's concerns.

It is critical that the Registration Review teams leave schools with enough information to begin working on their CEP's. To ensure this, teams might conduct a debriefing for the school's principal and planning team members as well as for the whole school. As with the opening discussion of the Self-Study, this would allow for an in-depth consideration of the findings and recommendations.

District Exit Conference

Teams' presentations to district office representatives, either at the school or the district office, were also rushed, and the team leader did all the talking. Several districts had already undergone one or more Registration Review visits for other schools, and seemed indifferent to the team's findings and recommendations. There was even less discussion with district staff than at the school presentations.

The Registration Review Visit and the Role of the District

The Registration Review focuses primarily upon problems within the school. However, as we have indicated, a number of stresses on SURR schools emanate directly from their districts' policy decisions. For many SURR schools, the district is the critical actor that can encourage or retard the school's development of the necessary capacity for self-improvement.

The Registration Review reports we analyzed focused on obvious district factors such as resource support-- textbooks, program development assistance, and

curriculum planning-- but neglected the more complex policy areas of district responsibility. One example must suffice. In a school with nearly half of its five hundred children in special education classrooms, the special education supervisor assigned to the school was also responsible for several other schools in the district. The team's report recommended a halt to all special education referrals, a reduction of the school's special education population, and the assignment of a full-time special education supervisor. Yet at the district debriefing, the district simply indicated that there were no available resources to meet the recommendations, and the school would have to consider reallocating its current resources.

From our observations, the district role in the Registration Review visits needs restructuring. We recommend that the Registration Review focus be expanded to include a specific segment that examines district responsibility for systemic stresses that may limit or depress school performance. When such district practices are identified, the Registration Review visit should allow for specific discussion with district administrators about possible solutions.

The Registration Review Reports

Ideally, the Registration Review visit offers a range of benefits. The interaction of Registration Review teams and school or district staff, the conversations generated among staff as part of the interviews and observations, and the debriefing and discussions that should be part of the Exit Conference, can all promote constructive dialogue about school-based improvement. However, as the primary function of the Registration Review visit is to produce a report, this capacity-building aspect of the visits often seems largely untapped.

The SED issued its own evaluation of the 1996-97 Registration Review visit reports. It found that, of 26 reports, eight were "exemplary" and five "inadequate as submitted," with the remainder falling somewhere between.[38] Within the eight reports described as "exemplary," there was a more explicit focus on problem areas at the school or district level, with one report citing a history of failure at the district-level in supporting its failing schools. Descriptions of community and school background were also far more informative than in other reports, effectively contextualizing school and community stresses.

Interestingly, a SED questionnaire to 1996-97 newly identified SURR schools found that 14 of 18 schools, found the information they received in the reports would be helpful to them in addressing the question of education improvement.[39]

Summary and Recommendations

The current Registration Review visits by external teams of practitioners do not meet their potential for identifying a school's problems in teaching and learning.

Instead, the visits too often identify examples of rule-bending and obvious signs of school failure.

- SED liaisons should be trained to help school planning teams develop useful oral Self-Studies, so that analytic dialogue focused on school improvement can occur among the school planning teams and between these school teams and the Registration Review teams.

- Registration Review teams need training in observation, interviewing, and the nature of useful evidence of school practice, as well as in diagnosing deeper structural and cultural causes of school failure. Increased Effective Schools funding might be used to fund this training.

- Training needs to be improved for the leadership of the Registration Review teams and the parent representatives. Team leaders also need a better understanding of overall team management, as well as what to focus on. Parents need interviewing skills, as well as an increased capacity to participate in reviewing school components other than the role of parents.

- Registration Review teams should receive an adequate complement of materials about the school in sufficient time to prepare themselves for the visits.

- Registration Review teams should be composed of subject-area and administrative practitioners, and the participation of constituency representatives (UFT, CSA, etc.) should be downplayed. The addition of New York City practitioners to upstate teams might well provide a useful mix of contributions similar to that currently provided in New York City.

- In addition to the opening dialogue with the school planning team, the Registration Review visit should include an initial presentation to the team by the SED liaison. This presentation should review the liaison's relationship with the school, summarize the liaison's perceptions of the school's performance and underlying problems, and situate the Review visit within the SURR process.

- The Registration Review visits should end with a thorough discussion between the visitors and the school planning team, as well as with the school as a whole. This discussion should be sufficiently detailed so that the school can proceed with planning *without* waiting for the written report.

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IV. Planning and Capacity Building in the SURR Process

> Transformation does not mean 'tinkering.' Transformation does not mean the continuation of past efforts to make annual 'tune-ups' to educational engines which are structurally, culturally, and educationally flawed.
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> --Chancellor Rudolph Crew[40]

A critical component of the SURR process, planning has two distinct and potentially conflicting functions. First, planning by SURR schools and districts is intended to build capacity for improvement. In Chancellor Crew's words, planning is to be part of the "re-culturing of low-performing schools." Second, the planning documents produced by the schools and their districts-- the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) and Corrective Action Plan (CAP)-- are the basis for compliance monitoring by the SED, and in New York City by the BOE as well.

SURR planning begins formally after schools and districts receive their reports from the Registration Review visits. In 1996-1997, SURR schools had between two and three months to create plans for school change. These plans are revised annually.

This chapter is based on information gathered during visits to ten SURR schools and particularly from observations of planning teams in action. Additional data stems from the IESP survey to principals and teachers in Groups I-III SURR schools.

The Plans

Three pre-formatted and structured plans drive school improvement, depending upon the placement of the school within SURR: the Comprehensive Education Plan(CEP) for newly identified SURR schools, the Corrective Action Plan(CAP) for districts with SURR schools, and the Redesign Plan for schools facing de-registration because of continuous failure to meet either their minimum or targeted performance standards.

In New York City, the SED offers schools and districts voluntary training in planning. In 1996-97, all newly identified NYC SURR schools participated. In addition, SURR schools are offered the choice of either: a Developmental Planner

diskette, an interactive program that allows schools to enter planning information, with the computerized program formatting the final product, or a Word Perfect planning document, in which schools simply fill in the required information. Districts can also use either a Developmental Planner or a Word Perfect document. In 1996-1997, the SED and BOE accepted plans developed on diskette from either program in hard-copy.

The CEP begins with a list of team members and asks a series of questions about the school's planning process. It then requests data on the school: teacher certification rates, grades served, student mobility rates, percent LEP and special education. Based on the findings of the Registration Review visit, the school must plan programs and activities and provide a timeline, a list of individuals responsible, and a description of how and when the various implementation activities will be assessed. There is no check to ensure that the plan reflects the school's Self-Study.

The District CAP, which must be written for every SURR school in the district, repeats information on the CEP, such as the school's planning team composition and the process used to make decisions, as well as basic data on the school. The CAP also requests information on the school's current instructional program as well as proposed changes, and asks how the district will support the school's improvement efforts. Finally, the report asks the district to specify how it will monitor and evaluate its own activities.

Redesign plans, developed by the Board of Education in 1996-97, are the final plans schools write before closure. They are the most prescriptive of the three plans; with schools given hard-copies of Redesign forms with blanks to fill in, rather than a computer diskette. Patterned after Robert Slavin's *Success for All* program, in which reading instruction is provided "relentlessly," literacy is a primary focus, and schools are required to institute 90-minute sustained literacy periods, one-on-one reading and writing for 20 minutes a day, and extended-day instructional activities. For each proposed action, the school must list the person responsible, the barriers or constraints, the type of assistance needed, the completion date, and the intended evaluation. These plans are being revised for 1997-98.

The Redesign and CEP plans must be approved at both the district and state level, while the CAP goes directly to the SED for approval. However, in NYC, both school and district plans must undergo the additional approved of the BOE.

Until recently, schools and districts developing these three plans were also burdened by planning required for such funded programs as Project Achieve, New York City's dropout prevention program, and Title I School-Wide programming. Some schools responded to these multiple requirements by creating three quite different plans that were largely paper exercises, generally causing what one district representative called "continuous planning fatigue." Fortunately, as planning has become widespread either because of Title I or district initiatives, there has been a statewide movement to consolidate all school plans, allowing schools to use their CEPs for all required purposes.

Planning Teams and Creating School-Wide Ownership

The State Education Department asks for maximum participation in creating a school plan in order to ensure that the school as a whole understands and agrees to the proposed changes. CEP and Redesign Planning teams are supposed to be composed of school administrators, teachers and other staff, parents, and state and district facilitators. Some planning teams also seek community-based organization representatives. However, because the plans are written under considerable time pressure, and many schools have not developed effective linkages among faculty or between teachers and parents, outreach often becomes symbolic. Limited funds to compensate planning efforts during after-school and weekend hours similarly limit the possibility of a large and diverse core of planners; although these funds have varied, in 1996-97, newly-identified SURR schools were given $5,000 planning grants from the SED. Often, the actual process of deciding on new instructional activities and revising curriculum is left to those few individuals who can mobilize some available time to develop the plan, with a chorus of others standing in the wings, waiting to sign on.

Core vs. Chorus. Planning team meetings observed by the IESP consisted of an inside group that conceptualized, defined, and drafted the plan's components and an outside chorus of compliant but non-active contributors—teachers, parents, and others. This chorus was often called upon only to ratify a decision that had already been reached.

In several schools, even this outside chorus was absent. In one newly-identified school, the CEP was being written by the school's staff developer and social worker, the only staff free to work throughout the day without additional compensation. The two disagreed staunchly about whether and how the school could be changed. In a school which had been removed from Registration Review, the principal reported writing the plan alone, and presenting it to staff only to gain the necessary signatures.

Principal Turnover. A critical obstacle to school-wide buy-in is the high turnover in leadership in SURR schools. Often plans drawn up under one principal must be implemented under another, or in some cases, principals change during the planning process itself. Among principal respondents to the IESP survey, the average tenure in Phase 1-3 schools was 2.9 years. However, 42% of the principals answering the survey had been in their school for less than one school year. In one school, three different principals had been assigned to the building during the six previous weeks of planning prior to the IESP observation. In another, a principal had come into school which already had a plan that this individual intended to ignore. Only half of Phase 1-3 respondents to the IESP survey (56%) reported that their plan "has held up well in getting the school where it needs to go," and a

substantial proportion (38%) reported that some of their strategies for improvement "fall outside the school's plan."

Ironically, given the high rates of principal turnover, principals appear more optimistic than teachers about the potential of the CEPs to improve their school. While 54.5% of principal respondents felt that their school's CEP "would lead to significant changes in student performance," only 20% of the teachers agreed. There may be several explanations for this difference. First, teachers have been in the school longer than the principal— the average length of tenure among teacher respondents was 12.5 years.[2] This longer tenure may make teachers more fatalistic about the capacity of any intervention and particularly a plan, to make a difference. Under pressure to raise student performance, teachers may view the planning process as another arena of compliance unlikely to solve the complex problems influencing successful instruction. Finally, it may be that principals are professionally better trained at planning, and see the potential link between planning and school improvement. Whatever the source of this principal/teacher discrepancy, it is not promising that even among principals, only half believe in the efficacy of the SURR planning process.

Parents as Symbolic Participants. Parents tend to be the most symbolic planning team participants; they act as silent witnesses that the process is being conducted in a legitimate fashion. Parents may be asked to agree to a particular curriculum package, but often they become articulate only when discussion focuses on issues of parent participation. In a planning team meeting observed by the IESP, four mothers with their children stood at the edges of the work group, while the principal repeatedly asked, "Where are the parents? What do they think? Do we have parents involved in this?" Yet the principal knew the names of everyone else on the planning team. At the conclusion of the planning session, these mothers were dismissed with the admonition, "Bring some more parents with you next time, because we are going to need them for signatures."

Communication With Staff Outside The Planning Teams. Planning teams may consist of a dozen staff members, but some schools have staffs of over two hundred. Schools used a variety of methods to communicate with the majority of staff not on the planning teams: posting meeting notes on bulletin boards; holding staff, departmental, or lunchroom meetings to discuss planning issues; or simply convening the planning meetings in the Teacher Center, so that other teachers who happened to come in could be asked for their input. Nevertheless, the primary mechanism for spreading information seemed to be word-of-mouth, with interested staff actively seeking to become informed, and others not bothering and therefore not

[2] The median tenure of teachers in New York City SURR schools is 12 years. In the rest of the State, the median tenure of teachers within SURR schools is 19 years; this compares with all NYC teachers whose median tenure is 13 years and all New York teachers whose median tenure is 18 years.(*New York The State of Learning: Statewide Profile of the Educational System*, (February, 1997) p.209.)

finding out. When the two person planning team referred to earlier was asked about buy-in from the rest of the staff, one of the two responded, "Well, in all honesty, they're going to look at the plan and say, 'Uh huh.'"

Two issues are critical. First, in any school there is generally a handful of committed staff members prepared to work hard for improvement; however, in low-performing schools this group is often quite isolated, and their commitment may even generate contempt from other staff. Second, large schools, and particularly those that have departmental divisions, often develop separate fiefdoms. School strategies to transcend these divisions require a significant leadership, effort, and time.

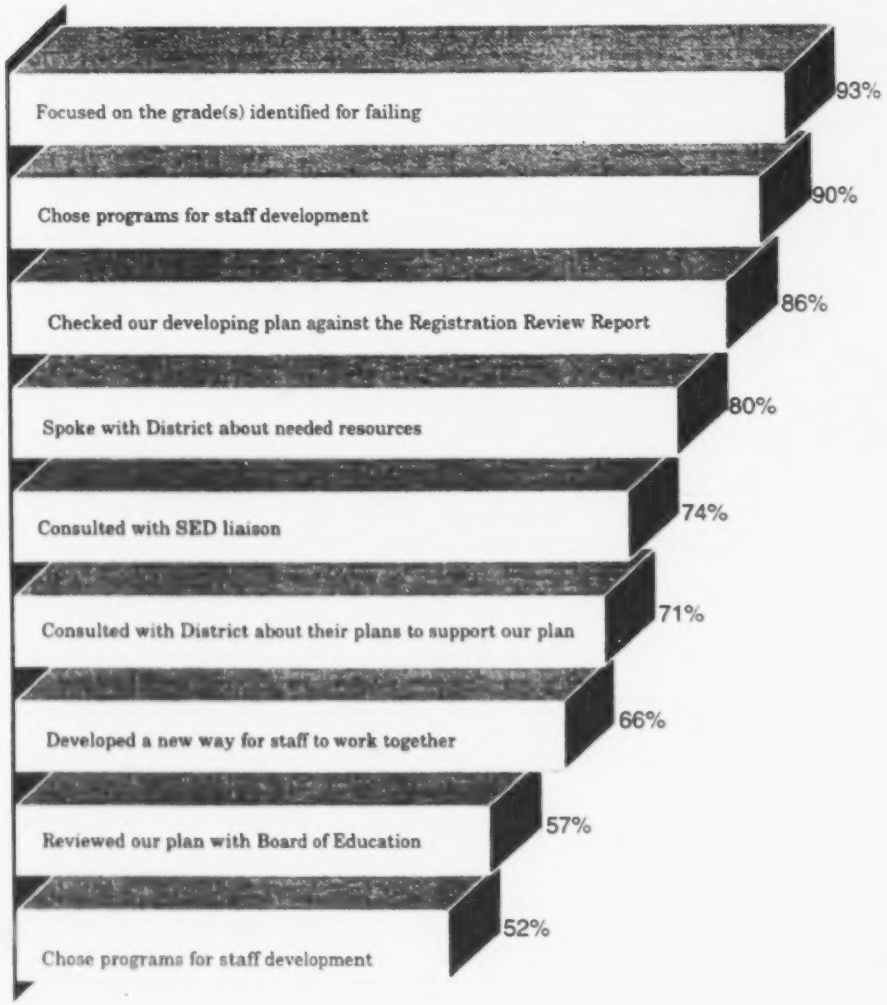
The Nature of Time Spent in Planning

Teams appear to meet once a week, with most school teams meeting more often as completion dates approach. However, even under the pressure of time, planning meetings often have multiple and competing functions. In sessions observed by the IESP, planning meetings provided relatively rare but important occasions in which the schools' active teachers were assembled, and so meetings were also used to address non-planning issues such as the giving of awards to faculty and students, or discussions about voting on union matters.

Some schools also assign sections of plans to subgroups, with the whole planning team then sharing the final edits. In these instances, whole group time seemed to be spent primarily in discussion about how to satisfy the mandates of the BOE and the State, or what instructions to give the individuals working with the computer planning program. Ironically, it was only in the two-person team that team members were observed actively engaging in debate over the potentials of a proposed instructional activity. Other teams tended to opt for packaged curriculum and traditional professional development solutions, rather than exploring the extent and causes of the school's academic weaknesses. There was very little grappling with the underlying issues that cause low achievement; even less with how to improve the achievement of particular groups of students.

Graph 4.1, below charts the components of the planning processes used by respondents to the IESP survey.

Graph 4.1
Processes Schools Followed To Develop School Plans



As the graph suggests, schools most commonly focused on the grade or grades identified as failing, a very limited approach to whole school change or capacity-building. By contrast, less than two-thirds of the respondents reported having developed a new way for staff to work together—one of the keys to significant and lasting school change.

District Planning

District Plans are written by one or more district staff members, reducing the need to orchestrate the availability of planning team members and the time spent discussing process and content. To develop their CAPs, the districts generally present the schools with a list of items to be incorporated into the school's CEP: after-school programs, a Teacher Center, common planning time for teachers, a media center or an extended reading period. Some districts also sent representatives to their SURR schools to help develop their CEP; the IESP often observed district representatives negotiating with other planning team members about which recommendations from the Registration Review visit the district was likely to support. In some districts, district staff also helped improve and standardize the production quality of their SURR schools' CEPs.

Districts with multiple SURR schools developed fairly standardized plans for how to assist these SURR schools, and some attempted to satisfy the State's demand for a CAP with minimal effort. Very few district offices appeared to grapple with larger policy changes that might help their low-performing schools. An exception: one district representative described how the district staff reviewed the school feeder patterns to ensure that no middle school would be unduly burdened by receiving too many students from the district's elementary SURR schools.

The Role of the SED Liaison in Planning

As a high-ranking BOE official noted, "a good planning process <u>is</u> professional development." Such a dramatic rethinking of a school's culture, organization, and instruction is a tremendous responsibility for a failing school's staff, one which most such schools cannot do adequately without significant assistance. Thus, direction and leadership for planning falls on the SED liaison, who is supposed to attend all planning meetings.

Our shadowing of planning meetings indicates that while liaisons did offer ideas, they were more generally viewed as an arm of the State—part monitor and part source of reassurance—and so appealed to for confirmation that a particular strategy or activity was "on target." Getting SED liaisons to be more active, and more helpful, during this stage of the SURR process probably entails both stressing this aspect of their roles and providing enhanced training.

Compliance versus Capacity-Building

The SED has created a staged, capacity-building process for school planning, in which the Self-Study precedes the Registration Review report, which precedes the CEP. However, our observations suggest that this building-block approach does not work as well as intended. Schools produce their Self-Studies more as a defense against the oncoming investigation than in a mode of self-examination. After schools have received the Registration Review report, they often rush to develop their plans, and then are forced to wait for external approval, rather than developing reflective processes that analyze instructional practices and explore strategies for improvement. Moreover, the revisions required by the BOE and SED are often perceived as exercises in compliance, rather than opportunities for growth.

We hope that an oral Self-Study process, as well as the opportunity for the planning teams to meet with the Registration Review visitors both for preliminary and debriefing sessions (described earlier), will provide opportunities for greater discussion. However, we see some conflict between using planning for capacity-building and SED (and, in New York City, BOE) efforts to create a compliance-driven improvement process. Although both the SED and the BOE rightly believe that SURR schools have forfeited the autonomy that high performing schools might exercise, the regulation, constraint and rigid prescription of the required plans tends to create superficial compliance and underlying cynicism, rather than the careful self-reflection and commitment required for genuine school improvement. Planning team members commonly referred to the CEP as "boring" and "repetitive." Although it may not in fact be repetitive, the nature of the formatted questions may well generate only superficial and generic responses.

Half the SURR school principals and teachers responding to the IESP survey believed that their CEP had "held up well in getting the school where it needs to go." Yet practitioners are forced to balance this limited confidence in their plans against the knowledge that they are being monitored on the implementation of these plans. In the past, the lack of accountability for implementation allowed schools to promise to improve without delivering any change (and even to promise different things to different agencies). But the current system may encourage a bifurcation of consciousness. Schools must do everything they can to improve their test scores, which, in the absence of confidence in their plan for improvement, suggests narrowing their focus to test preparation and perhaps attempting to control the body of tested students. On the other hand, schools must devote energy and resources to implementing the plans in which they themselves have, at best, only modest faith.

Summary and Recommendations

Planning is a major component of the SED's strategy for improving SURR schools, and it is becoming an increasingly widespread aspect of school reform

throughout New York State. However, time constraints and compliance issues limit planning's effectiveness as an effort to build the capacity of school staff for genuine and sustained improvement. In many SURR schools, frequent principal turnover and the isolation of planners from the rest of the school prevent the planning process from involving a large and sustained group of individuals, and limit buy-in and participation from the wider staff. Finally, because many SURR schools do not have sufficient capacity for the demands of effective planning, technical assistance in this area should be a key role of the SED liaisons.

- The planning process should not begin in a school until there is a principal at the helm, committed to remaining in the school for at least three years. Incentives to attract effective principals and teachers, committed to remaining in low-performing schools for a specified time-period, might help assure school stability and increase instructional quality.

- Planning teams need support to go beyond a narrow focus on the grade level(s) identified as failing, to comprehensively reorganize instruction. Teams also need support to move beyond packaged curriculum and short-term staff development programs to envision more complex but deeper routes to change.

- Planning teams need help in their efforts to incorporate team members, particularly parents, in cooperative work that elicits and utilizes each member's contributions.

- SED liaisons do not appear to be assisting schools and districts sufficiently with planning. Further training could help to prepare the liaisons for this activity.

- SED's current system of monitoring plans can create an attitude of compliance that inhibits schools' capacities to work towards ownership of the improvement process. Narrative reports created by SED liaisons in the process of offering technical assistance would help to more effectively encourage reflection, and would also provide richer and more useful information to the State.

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V. The Effectiveness of Support to SURR Schools

> The profile of a typically low-performing school...is remarkably predictable. It is likely to be impoverished... have a high rate of at-risk young people, and have been abandoned by middle class and by white parents. These conditions call for intervention and support strategies that go beyond school walls and into the increasingly dysfunctional communities that surround them.
>
> --SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education[41]

New York State's plan for supporting SURR schools is intended to address the complex issues effecting low-performance. In addition to assistance with curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, technology— all of which focus directly on improving classroom practice during the regular school day— a recent SED document notes that support to SURR schools also include: pre-k, extended day, community school, and family center opportunities; community, business and interagency support; and education and support for parent advocates and curriculum-based parent training.[42]

Though the variety of services suggests comprehensive support to low-performing schools, individual SURR schools still appear to receive an uncertain patchwork of supports. The difficulty the IESP encountered in obtaining information about support services available to SURR schools suggests that both SED project managers and SED liaisons, as well as SURR school staff, must be quite enterprising to navigate the complicated support landscape.[43] This difficulty is exacerbated because some services depend on applying for, and winning, competitive grants. (The SED is aware that grant-writing is a skill lacking in many SURR schools, and workshops have been offered specifically in this area.) Finally, a number of programs have different budget streams, which make it difficult for both the SED and individual schools to integrate the programs into meaningful support systems.

The following discussion is based on information about supports provided by the SED managers and liaisons between November 1, 1996 and November 24, 1997. Although our research discovered other services sponsored by the SED, including a parent training program for SURR schools provided by the New York Technical

Assistance Center (NYTAC), we include here only those supports identified by the SED. The SED is currently working on a new updated list of services, which we hope will be still more comprehensive."

As Table 5.1 suggests, the SED sponsors three programs exclusively for SURR schools: while one is a web site, the other two programs reach a total of four SURR schools.

Table 5.1
State Education Department Projects Serving Only SURR Schools, 1996-1997

Project Name	Project Description	Project Scope	Access to Project
SURR Schools Web Site	Location where all SURR schools with internet access may find instructional resources for teachers.	No information available on usage of this site by SURR school staff	Managed by Columbia University Institute for Learning Technologies.
Family Literacy Project sponsored by the Family Resource Center	Technical assistance and resources provided to develop and implement parent education services, particularly adult literacy programs.	2 SURR schools in New York City	SED identified/ school commits resources.
Artists and Teachers Partnerships for Excellence Multiple Intelligence Project	To improve students' math and reading skills, professional development sessions are provided in multiple intelligence theory and alternative assessment. Teams of special and general education teachers, principals, school mentors and teaching artists work collaboratively to design school renewal plans that integrate arts with curriculum-based, thematic projects and accompanying assessments that are aligned with the state and city curriculum frameworks.	2 SURR schools in New York City	SED identified/ school commits resources.

In addition to the programs provided solely by the SED to SURR schools, a number of state and locally-sponsored educational programs not designed specifically for SURR schools-- have been implemented by some SURR schools. The SED classifies these programs in three broad categories: State Education Department Collaborations with other institutions, Models of Excellence, and Ad Hoc Programs.

New York State Education Department Collaborative Projects

New York State Education Department collaborations have been developed with a variety of other State, city, and private agencies, such as the State Departments of Health and Mental Health, the Office of Special Education Services, the New York Foundation for the Arts, medical centers, universities, and colleges. These collaborative efforts are designed to provide school personnel with technical assistance, and students with important health, mental health, and educational services. Tables 5.2a, 5.2b, and 5.2c divide these programs by whether they are school-wide, student-directed, or staff development efforts.

Table 5.2a
Collaborative School-wide Projects,
1996-97

Project Name	Project Description	Project Scope	Access to Project
Learning Technology Grant	Program offers public schools and their non-public school partners funding to support technology across the curriculum.	24 NYC schools 13 SURR schools	competitive grant
Eiffel Project	provides schools with expanded technological resources and a medium for engaging students as active learners.	21 schools 6 SURR schools	SED and Institute for Learning Technology identified schools
New York Healthier Schools Project	Orientation provides NYC SURR schools with access to the SED/BOE's Comprehensive School Health and Wellness Program. Program aims to improve health status of children linking low-performing schools with community-based organizations, parents, and other supportive groups.	17 SURR schools	SED identified/ schools commit after orientation.
Task Force on School-Community Collaboration and Partners for Children	The SED provides TA to grant recipients to set-up interagency/school-based, school-linked services. SED's collaboration with the Task Force also addresses capacity-building strategies.	State-wide RFP. Community-based programs in Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx and Queens. Reaches at least 3 SURR schools.	competitive grant

The collaborative school-wide projects focus on both technology resources and linkages between the school and other health and community agencies, and so begin to attack the larger social factors impinging on SURR schools. However, it is important to note that 2 of the 4 projects are accessed through competitive grants, and that in 1996-97 only 20 SURR schools had health and community services programs. (Note that the school-based health clinics mentioned in Chapter 2 are not listed by the SED as among the SURR supports.)

Table 5.2b
Collaborative Student-Directed Projects,
1996-97

Project Name	Project Description	Project Scope	Access to Project
Pre-kindergarten Head Start	Extended day Head Start program placed within specific schools.	N.A.	N.A.
Pre-health	Health services extended to pre-kindergarten programs other than Head Start.	N.A.	N.A.
School-based Mental Health Services Initiative	Provides on-site mental health services to children and adolescents diagnosed with, or at-risk of, serious emotional disturbance. Allows children with serious emotional disturbances to remain in the least restrictive educational placement.	4 schools in New York City 3 SURR schools	SED/Office of Mental Health identified/ schools commit resources
Alternative Programs to Special Education On-site Mental Health Services	On-site mental health services to schoolchildren needing clinical support to be maintained in regular classroom settings. Also provides parents and school personnel with greater access to mental health services.	79 schools throughout New York City 9 SURR schools	SED identified/ schools commit resources
SuperStart	The SED provides funding for staffing positions for pre-K services in high poverty/Title I schools.	N.A.	N.A.
Boy Scouts of America	The After-School Scouting program provides reading and math skills development, science and nature activities, a variety of physical fitness and recreational activities to students at their school.	3 SURR schools	City-wide invitational mailing/ orientation

The programs shown in Table 5.2b, are among the state and federal programs offered to low-income communities. Since their placement is determined by a combination of need and available space, SURR schools may well be entitled to these services, but overcrowding may prevent them from receiving them. The chart above also suggests that because of different funding streams, there may be overlapping services.

Among the programs offered to all schools throughout the State of New York, the Teacher Centers, the Harvard Principals' Center Summer Institute, the Reading and Mathematics Institutes, and the School Quality Review Initiative have recently been categorized as "Priority Services to SURR Schools" by the SED.[45] All four programs focus on capacity building through staff development in different arenas. We discuss them more fully below.

Project Name	Project Description	Project Scope	Access to Project
Teacher Centers	Run by the UFT, these school-based Centers provide a range of staff development activities.	114 Centers in New York; 27 Centers in SURR schools; 47 SURR schools receive services from Teachers Centers	Teachers have unlimited access to Center materials and activities in their own school. Workshops, and on-site support also provided in other schools.
Harvard Principals' Center, Summer Institute	Two-week training institute at Harvard University that provides principals with information on effective school management, leadership, and restructuring practices. SED conducts follow-up support sessions with principals throughout the year.	10 SURR principals; 10 non-SURR principals	All SURR principals invited to apply; SED chooses 10.
Early Childhood Conference	Two-day technical assistance and staff development conference for general and special education administrators, teachers, teacher-assistants, family workers, and social workers about creating quality early childhood education programs for all children.	32 school districts, day care, Head Start, non-public schools-- 2,000 attendees	City-wide invitational mailing.
Reading Recovery	Staff development for teachers in providing early intensive intervention for children who experience difficulty learning to read.	4 SURR schools	Invitational mailing; orientation session; interested schools commit resources.
Reading and Mathematics Institutes	8 one-day Reading and Mathematics Institutes between 10/96-5/97 for teachers, administrators, and staff developers working in low-performing schools. Each featured strategies for improving instructional practice in mathematics and reading.	All SURR schools	City-wide mailing with follow-up calls; space reserved for principal and 3 staff from each SURR school.
TA for grant writing	SED sponsored TA to help SURR schools access additional resources and improve grant-writing; sessions focus on Head Start and Learning Technology grants.	TA for Head Start grants offered at a conference attended by 2,000 early childhood educators, including staff from most SURR schools. TA for Learning Technology grants attended by 128 personnel from SURR schools.	City-wide invitational mailing.
Learning Styles	University-sponsored staff development on different learning styles.	Piloted at one SURR school; all teachers were trained.	SED and university identified/ school committed resources
School Quality Review Initiative	Provides school staff transitioning to non-SURR status with opportunity to engage in a prescribed capacity building, self-review, and continuous improvement process.	61 schools; of these, 11 are SURR and 25 are former SURR or Redesign schools.	Citywide mailing; schools must commit.
Early Childhood Programs	TA to teachers in SURR schools.	For SURR schools pre-k to 3 city-wide. Number involved N.A.	Request initiated by teachers.

As can be seen from Table 5.2c, the Teacher Centers, the Reading and Math Institutes and the Early Childhood Conference all offer staff development activities for most or all SURR schools. However, there is a wide range of access to these supports. At one end are the Teacher Centers, which provide rooms in each of school with materials, activities and other support available to teachers and other staff on a daily basis, at the other are projects which may be located in a school *after* the school has won a competitive grant, or invitational, short-term workshops and Institutes that occur *outside* the school and are attended by varied numbers of staff from any individual school. It is also important to recall that all staff development efforts are hindered by high staff turnover in many SURR schools, and that staff development alone cannot compensate for the low numbers of certified and experienced teaching staff in many SURR schools.

Teacher Centers. Founded in 1979, Teacher Centers have been located in a growing number of schools statewide. A collaborative project of the State Education Department, local districts and the United Federation of Teachers, these Centers provide voluntary staff development activities, including workshops, courses, and access to instructional materials and technology. As of May 1997, there were 118 Teacher Centers statewide, with a number of new Centers scheduled to open in SURR and other schools in 1997-98. Directed at on-site school staff, as well as other staff in the district, borough, and City, the Teacher Center workshops and courses focus on educational technologies, effective teaching practices, education reform, and specific instructional areas. Since teachers self-select for these workshops and courses, teachers with the greatest initiative may well receive the most assistance.

Teachers Centers evaluations commissioned by the state have yielded two types of information: 1) on the number and kinds of professional development activities offered; and 2) on self-reported teacher satisfaction and belief in program utility. A 1996 evaluation of Teacher Centers, based on data from the 1994-95 academic year, shows Teacher Centers presenting technology-related workshops and courses to over 48,000 teachers and school community members, and offering learning activities in subject content and instructional strategies to over 300,000 teachers and other school personnel.[46] Unfortunately, these high numbers aggregate one-time, two-hour after-school workshops with ongoing study groups and intensive long-term courses with follow-up support. Noting that the difference in potential impact among these various activities "is enormous," the evaluation points out that some Centers "may be too dependent on the limited model of one-shot workshops."[47]

The teacher opinion studies use surveys filled out by staff in the Teacher Centers, as well as by teachers and administrators who use the Teacher Centers' services. These surveys report a high degree of teacher and principal satisfaction. A 1995 assessment of the Centers noted that "teachers very frequently report that their participation causes them to reflect on and experiment with changes in their practice with positive student outcomes, at least for the short term."[48]

While the information in these two types of evaluation is useful, it is limited in scope and depth. Despite research indicating the importance of having a critical mass of teachers at a school who understand and are capable of employing a particular instructional method, these evaluations do not allow for a systematic analysis of how many teachers and other staff in any given school have used the Centers or have been trained in a particular method. (This is particularly critical, given the high teacher turnover in a number of SURR schools.) More significant, these evaluations yield little substantive data about the impact of Teacher Center programs either on teachers' classroom practice or on student learning.

Observations in SURR schools suggest that the Teacher Centers are dependent on the entrepreneurial efforts of their staff. While some create a range of initiatives, and spend enormous effort in outreach, others develop fewer offerings and rely solely on teacher initiative to use the Center. Some Centers in SURR schools appear isolated from the culture of their host school, and some Teacher Center staff seem to be in conflict with school-level staff developers.

The voluntary nature of Teacher Centers' programs complicates their efforts at professional development. While we concur with the Teacher Center staff's belief that teachers cannot be forced to learn, staff who need the most help may not be the ones persistently reached and engaged. In some SURR schools visited by the IESP team, Teacher Center personnel spoke of rarely seeing those teachers whom they thought most needed assistance. Moreover, unless specifically invited by the teachers, Teacher Center staff often seem reluctant to do classroom follow-ups to ensure that the teachers have actually absorbed and integrated the training.

Although we concur with Teacher Center staff who believe that they cannot effectively combine development and teacher assessment, the Centers are a key component of the SED's staff development efforts, and should be evaluated. We recommend a rigorous external evaluation that describes the scope and intensity of school involvement in Teacher Center activities, and links Center activities to teachers' instructional changes and student gains at the school-level.

Reading and Mathematics Institutes. 1996-97 was the second year that the New York State Department of Education conducted a series of Reading and Mathematics Institutes for teachers, administrators, and staff developers in low-performing schools. To provide continuity, on-going support, and an opportunity for school staff to learn from one another, schools are supposed to participate in at least four Institutes during the year. Separate, and in some instances combined training sessions are provided at three levels: elementary, middle and high school. Four to five sessions are content specific to each school level. Eight Institutes were held in 1996-97.

Evaluation of the 1996-97 Reading and Mathematics Institutes consists of data from questionnaires administered after each Institute: 260 reading, mathematics, and English language arts teachers, 233 district and building-level staff developers, and 117 district and building administrators completed the

questionnaires. In aggregated results, all aspects of the workshops rated, "good to excellent." Asked to rate the extent to which previous Reading and Mathematics Institutes had impacted their teaching practice, many respondents indicated that they shared or used the information obtained.[49]

Although the questionnaire results suggest a high degree of teacher satisfaction and belief in the utility of the workshops, the nature of these results illustrate the need for more in-depth evaluation. Questionnaires that solicit ratings from participants, while useful, do not analyze program depth, scope, and effectiveness. Similarly, the attempt to ascertain the impact of the Institutes over time through comparisons of self-reported data on usage of instructional methods does not provide the information necessary to gauge classroom implementation.

School Quality Review Initiative. The School Quality Review Initiative (SQRI) is designed to support and strengthen schools by coupling an external review with an internal self-review process that encourages staff responsibility for continuous school improvement.

Used on a voluntary basis in schools throughout New York State, the School Quality Review Initiative was introduced by the SED to support SURR schools that have raised their performance sufficiently to be removed from Registration Review. Schools undergoing the SQRI receive technical assistance about academic content, pedagogical strategies, state and city-wide standards, and RFP development. Districts with five or more School Quality Review Initiative schools are given a SQRI consultant to provide on-going support and assistance by the SED.

Thus far we have found no evaluation of the effectiveness and results of the School Quality Review Initiative.

Harvard Principals' Center Summer Institute. The Principals' Center (PCSI) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education is a two-week residential summer institute for administrators. Participants learn practical leadership skills and review the latest research on school reform and restructuring. Workshops also focus on adult development, supervision and evaluation, communication, equity, managing negotiations, community involvement, and the processes of change.

For the past several years, the SED has provided funding for a limited number of principals of SURR schools to attend the PCSI. The SED sends applications to all SURR principals, and then chooses a diverse group of ten participants, determined by factors such as geography and school level, to participate in the summer institute. Ten non-SURR principals are also selected, and paired with SURR principals. These pairings are intended to create year-long collegial learning partnerships. In addition, during the summer of 1997, all the principals whom the Chancellor intended to keep in SURR schools were sent to the Harvard Principals' Center Summer Institute for training.

Graduates of this Institute become members of the Principals' Center for one year and are entitled to attend the Principals' Center's lecture series and to use

Harvard's libraries. Unfortunately, these services are relatively inaccessible to New York City principals. Principals are also entitled to a newsletter and to follow-up technical assistance from the Principals' Centers; however, the principals have to initiate the call for assistance.

In addition, the New York State Department of Education has designed its own program to support the Summer Institute graduates. Each month, participants meet to reflect on their Harvard experience and discuss the challenges they face in their schools.

Harvard certificates are displayed on the walls of a number of principals of SURR schools, and the principals interviewed by the IESP team spoke glowingly of their experiences at the PCSI. The Harvard connection clearly provides principals with a morale boost, giving new dignity to the difficult task of improving their schools. However, PCSI program evaluations are limited to questionnaires given to participants at the end of the Institute and again at the end of the year, and there is no analysis of the impact of the Institutes on the schools'. Such an evaluation seems necessary, given that the PCSI is a substantial investment for the State, and constitutes a major effort at developing leadership in SURR schools.

Models of Excellence

The State Education Department has adopted several nationally recognized school improvement programs, which it calls Models of Excellence, for use in New York State schools. Since review of these programs is currently being conducted under another contract to the SED, we simply list the Models and their usage below.

In 1994-95, 24 out of 54 SURR New York City schools selected a Models of Excellence Program.[50] More recently, in November of 1997, SED reports indicate that 50 of 113 SURR schools statewide had selected one of the Models of Excellence.

Table 5.3

Model of Excellence As of 11/97	Model Descriptions	Number of SURR Schools
School Development Program (Comer Model)	Focuses on restructuring relationships among school staff and between the school and its families to emphasize collaboration.	16
Success for All	Provides instructional strategies and materials that emphasize oral reading, comprehension skills, integration of reading and writing, and cooperative learning techniques.	5
Efficacy	Language arts curriculum provides teachers with strategies to help children develop positive learning-related attitudes and behavior.	11
Effective Schools	Includes ten elements of "effective schools" identified by Ron Edmunds.	10
Accelerated Schools	Provides a framework for changes in school governance. Instructional improvement occurs through hands-on activities and open-ended problem solving that allows children to connect school activities with their lives.	3
Reading Recovery	Provides early intensive intervention for children who experience difficulty learning to read.	4
Basic School Model	Provides a framework for restructuring schools around four fundamental priorities: community, climate, character, and curriculum (particularly language arts).	1

Ad Hoc Programs

SURR schools also take advantage of a variety of services provided by community organizations, churches, and volunteer groups that work with either specific student populations or the whole school. Although there is no comprehensive list of these supports, services include counseling, family intervention, and after-school homework and test-preparation programs. Of these, test preparation programs appear to be the most popular. Interviews and observations in SURR schools also suggest that, while some SURR schools have few such programs, other SURR schools are quite entrepreneurial in mobilizing community resources and assistance.

Although this ad hoc approach to support is critical to many schools, the patchwork of services many SURR schools are able to access may neither cover critical needs nor effectively meet them. There is a need for an articulated process connecting schools to available services, guidelines for assessing the kinds of assistance that may be most useful, and standards for evaluating the quality of these services.

The IESP Survey of Support to SURR Schools

In the spring of 1997, the IESP team surveyed SURR schools about where they are likely to get the help they need. Survey questions were developed on the basis of preliminary information provided by the SED, as well as by principals whose schools had been on the SURR list.

Methodology. Superintendents of every New York State school district with a SURR school were contacted and informed about the survey. Superintendents in three districts, representing 18 SURR schools, refused to participate in the survey. The remaining 83 principals were then asked to volunteer their schools for the study. Sixteen principals refused, leaving 67 schools of the 101 schools identified in SURR. Surveys were mailed to each of the 67 principals, along with three teacher surveys. (Surveys were differentiated, depending on whether the school was a newly identified SURR, Group 4, or Groups 1-3 of the SURR process.) Principals were directed to choose teachers on their school's planning teams, since they would likely be more knowledgeable about SURR and the supports the schools were receiving as part of the SURR process. Of 268 surveys mailed, 128 were returned; 36 surveys were received from principals and 92 from teachers. These numbers represent 54 percent of all principals and 45 percent of all teachers from the schools who agreed to participate in the study.

In the following pages, we present information from the 71 teachers and 27 principals from schools in Groups 1 through 3 of the SURR process, since these schools had been under Registration Review long enough to experience the variety of

support services available. These survey results are not meant to provide hard data about who provides services to SURR schools. Instead, they offer a sample of what services SURR school practitioners *perceive* themselves as receiving, and from *whom*.

Perceived Services, by School-Level

Since it was less important to analyze information by teacher/principal respondents than by school-level, we have created three school-level tables, listing the different agencies that elementary, middle, and high school staff look to for resources. Respondents selected as many sources as applicable, so the percentages often exceed 100.

Elementary Schools. Table 5.4 suggests that elementary schools perceive their district office as most helpful in all areas of assistance, followed by the SED and the BOE. The UFT is seen as helpful in certain areas of professional development, particularly instructional issues and teacher support. Private agencies and foundations tend to be perceived as helpful largely for technology, health and mental health, and parent involvement.

Middle Schools. Table 5.5 suggests that middle schools perceive their district office as most helpful in all areas, and that the district is seen as giving more assistance among middle school staff than among elementary school staff. By contrast, assistance from both the SED and the BOE is perceived to drop off at the middle school level. Although assistance from private agencies also appears to drop off for middle schools, middle school respondents report receiving significant private assistance for technology in the classroom-- and in this one area, they report receiving more than elementary schools or high schools.

Compared to the other school levels, middle schools perceive themselves as receiving the least assistance with staff development. Only two types of staff development were mentioned by over 40 percent of the respondents-- academic standards, and teacher support-- both offered by the district office.

High Schools. Table 5.6 suggests that high schools perceive the SED as the most helpful agency. While the high school respondents see their district office (in New York City, the high school superintendency) as less helpful compared to middle and elementary schools, they perceive the Board of Education as consistently more helpful compared to middle schools. High school respondents tend to see the UFT as less helpful than respondents at other school levels. High schools also experience the least amount of assistance from private agencies, the two exceptions being help with planning and assistance with parent involvement programs. It is also noteworthy that high schools perceive no assistance from any agency in the areas of health and mental health.

Table 5.4
Perceptions of Elementary School Staff about Assistance
N= 71

Type of Service	Agency				
	SED	BOE	District Office	UFT	Private Agency or Foundation
Help with planning	52%	37%	69%	37%	17%
Technology in the classroom	11%	21%	59%	10%	28%
Arts and music programming	6%	8%	14%	8%	31%
Professional Development on:					
instructional issues	31%	30%	66%	42%	4%
school restructuring	41%	39%	39%	21%	1%
assessment issues	45%	38%	51%	18%	4%
academic standards	47%	49%	58%	17%	1%
teacher support	24%	21%	59%	48%	3%
team building	18%	24%	31%	21%	7%
working with parents	24%	27%	58%	17%	14%
leadership	30%	24%	35%	18%	11%
other	1%	1%	4%	0%	3%
Health and mental health	14%	16%	11%	0%	31%
Parent involvement programs	27%	25%	55%	21%	27%
After school activities	8%	31%	58%	3%	32%

Table 5.5
Perceptions of Middle School Staff about Assistance
N= 19

Type of Service	Agency				
	SED	BOE	District Office	UFT	Private Agency or Foundation
Help with planning	68%	26%	63%	42%	26%
Technology in the classroom	16%	16%	42%	5%	42%
Arts and music programming	0%	5%	16%	5%	21%
Professional Development on:					
instructional issues	16%	21%	53%	21%	10%
school restructuring	16%	10%	26%	16%	16%
assessment issues	26%	26%	37%	5%	0%
academic standards	26%	16%	42%	10%	0%
teacher support	26%	10%	42%	37%	21%
team building	10%	10%	32%	21%	5%
working with parents	16%	16%	21%	10%	5%
leadership	21%	21%	26%	26%	16%
other	5%	5%	10%	5%	5%
Health and mental health	16%	16%	5%	0%	21%
Parent involvement programs	5%	16%	32%	11%	16%
After school activities	10%	21%	63%	5%	16%

Tables 5.6
Perceptions of High School Staff About Assistance
N= 8

Type of Service	Agency				
	SED	BOE	District Office	UFT	Private Agency or Foundation
Help with planning	50%	38%	38%	0%	38%
Technology in the classroom	38%	25%	50%	12%	25%
Arts and music programming	0%	0%	12%	0%	25%
Professional Development on:					
instructional issues	50%	38%	50%	0%	12%
school restructuring	50%	38%	50%	0%	25%
assessment issues	62%	38%	50%	12%	12%
academic standards	62%	38%	50%	12%	0%
teacher support	50%	25%	38%	12%	0%
team building	50%	25%	38%	12%	12%
working with parents	12%	12%	12%	12%	0%
leadership	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%
other					
Health and mental health	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Parent involvement programs	0%	12%	0%	0%	37%
After school activities	0%	25%	25%	0%	0%

Summary and Recommendations

A 1994 report of the Regents' Subcommittee on Low-Performing Schools argued that, "state and local support of low-performing schools remains insufficient to support the tremendous need for technical assistance and resources; [and] unstable leadership and inexperienced staff impede the implementation of even the most well-conceived school improvement plan."[51]

Despite significant SED expenditures, support to SURR schools remains a patchwork, whose utility is often diminished by staff turnover and the difficulty of combining funding streams. While some schools appear more entrepreneurial than others in obtaining services and supports, the pressure to use "anything and everything available," as one principal put it, easily encourages SURR schools staff to spend staff and student time in supports that may not be most suited to their needs. Despite SED technical assistance on grant-writing, and the availability of a variety of competitive grants, those SURR schools with the most capacity-building needs may well remain the most under-served.

The Teacher Centers, the Harvard Principals' Center Summer Institute, the Reading and Mathematics Institutes, and the School Quality Review Institute are among the SED's major efforts to create a system of staff development that strengthens both teaching and administrative leadership. Each have some serious shortcomings. Recent research indicates that effective professional development must involve a significant proportion of school staff, that it must include repeated modeling, observation and feedback, and that it must be sustained. While some Teacher Center programs may offer such elements of successful professional development, we have little evidence to confirm this. While the SED has attempted to supplement the Harvard Principal's Center Summer Institute with ongoing supports, we have no evidence about what influence this combined program has on improving principal effectiveness. The Reading and Mathematics Institutes do not include the sustained modeling, observation, and feedback advocated by the research. Most important none of these programs has been subjected to a systematic, comprehensive evaluation that would enable the SED to understand their quality, effectiveness and role in its system of supports to SURR schools.

- The SED should explore strategies to help stabilize leadership and improve the experience and training of teachers in all low-performing schools. Without this basic measure, staff development efforts are likely to remain limited.

- A comprehensive list of all supports used by SURR schools, including those offered by local districts, professional organizations, school reform organizations, community and church groups, would help schools to better access the support and services they need. In addition, the SED should survey all

SURR schools to ascertain what supports are being accessed school by school.

- Evaluations should be conducted of the Teacher Centers, the Harvard Principals' Center Summer Institute, the Reading and Mathematics Institutes, and the School Quality Review Institute. Drawing on the latest theories of effective professional development, these evaluations should offer suggestions for enhancing these vehicles to offer effective and sustained support to SURR schools.

- Although the SED has worked with other agencies to strengthen community supports to SURR schools, as well as to establish programs for improving the health and mental health of families in these schools, such programs are less available than the SED's staff development and instructional support programs. Moreover, their diverse funding streams tend to complicate their use. Given the community-based stresses identified in Chapter 2, we suggest a more concerted effort to include such supports, as well as to integrate them into the general programming for SURR schools.

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VI. Assessing SURR School Progress

> "The basic argument underlying the value-added approach is that true excellence resides in the ability of the school or college *to affect its students favorably,* to enhance their intellectual development, and to make a positive difference in their lives."
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> --W. Astin[52]

This chapter discusses several ways of assessing SURR school progress. It reviews recent SURR school performance, and answers two questions asked by the SED: How do we assess students to ensure that achievement is increasing, and that changes in test scores do not simply reflect changes in demographics and test preparation, and is there a way to incorporate into the new state assessment program a value-added approach to assessing improvement in education?

Recent Performance of SURR Schools

A July 1997 SED analysis of student performance in the current group of SURR schools concluded that "school-by-school reform is working."[53] Specifically the SED's analysis showed that between the 1995-96 and 1996-97 academic years, SURR schools as a group made significant progress toward meeting or exceeding the minimum standards and performance targets established by the Commissioner for each school.

There were differences among the four phases of SURR schools: Redesign, Corrective Action, non-Corrective action SURR schools and newly identified SURR schools. Redesign schools had the poorest performance of all groups during the 1996-97 year. While New York City's Corrective Action schools showed some areas of improvement, they were the least successful group in reaching their performance targets. The non-Corrective Action SURR schools showed substantial gains in some areas and declines in others; but several schools in this category met their performance targets and will be considered for removal from SURR. Finally the performance of the newly-identified SURR schools was consistently positive. Many of these newly identified schools made sufficient progress in reaching all of the school's minimum standards.

While the increases in performance for many SURR schools is most likely related to SURR efforts, the SED report also showed that, despite the substantial gains, the overall proportion of students in SURR schools who meet state standards is still substantially below the desired level. Moreover, the SED report indicated much unevenness of performance among the categories of schools and across grade levels. More recently, a comparison of the reading performance of the 86 New York City SURR elementary and middle-schools in 1996 and 1997 showed schoolwide gains in 69, or over 80 percent of the schools. This suggests that improvement in New York City is not limited to one grade or students in the bottom quartile.

Ways Schools Can Get Off The List Without Improving

Indications are that a number of schools have been removed from SURR because of general and sustainable improvement. As the EPP's *Getting Off The List* noted, in addition to the areas cited, 8 of the 10 schools it studied, "improved in two-thirds or more of the measures included in the analysis."[54] However, the urgency to get off SURR has not always given school staff either the will or the capacity to create genuine school improvement. In some schools, staff attribute low academic performance to the limited ability of their students, and see the school's low performance as intractable. More commonly, school staff say they have high expectations for their students, but they show uncertainty about how to improve instruction, or are cynical about the SURR process. "Why are they increasing the number of schools they identify when they can't even give us the help we need in turning our school around?" asked one principal.

A number of SURR schools have focused narrowly on preparing the targeted grades' students for the reading or math test, altering the pool of students taking the tests, or revising how scores are reported. (The EPP's *Getting off the List* noted that in one school that had gotten off the list, a number of school staff persons expressed serious doubts about how well the school was functioning, and the school appeared to have used the scores of an unrelated mini-school housed in the same building to increase its average test scores.)[55] Although one would expect a certain reluctance among school staff to discuss approaches to improving schoolwide test scores, the IESP team heard remarkably straightforward disclosures by principals (and sometimes by teachers) about how their schools expected to get off the list. Drawing examples from these disclosures, the following discussion divides strategies into test preparation and changing the pool of test takers.

Test Preparation. Test preparation includes a wide range of activities. Often administrators simply make clear to teachers and their students that doing well on standardized tests is important. Sometimes teachers focus on skills thought to improve performance, or give students practice tests to increase their scores. All the schools we observed were doing some form of test preparation to raise their

performance. Moreover, a common form of after-school programming provided by churches and community groups was in test preparation. Not surprisingly given the stakes, principals appear relatively unconcerned with the longer term effects on student capacity that result when teachers reduce the curriculum to focus relentlessly on test preparation and on the very narrow set of skills to be tested.

Changing the Testing Pool. Previous research indicates that schools can alter the testing pool to decrease the number of low-performing students. In the mid 1980's, Gottfredson found that the reported increase in average achievement of students in one district was related to delaying the entry of the lowest-scoring students into the assessment stream.[56] Similarly, McGill-Franzen and Allington studied the effects on children in low-performing schools of New York State's Comprehensive Assessment Report (CAR), the precursor to SURR. They argue that, although the schools reported small gains in reading achievement by the end of the 1980s, retention in the primary grades increased, as did the number of children identified as handicapped.[57] The authors note that, "some schools actually look more 'effective' after they implement rigid policies for retaining low-achieving children with younger cohorts."[58]

An analysis of retention and special education policies among SURR schools such as McGill-Franzen and Allington conducted was beyond the scope of the first year of the IESP study. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the same strategies are occurring in some SURR schools. A principal of a school cited for third grade reading spoke of developing a system for assessing kindergarten through 2nd grade to discover "those kids who need more time" before taking the test. According to the principal, the school had improved its passing rate by 15% in 1996-97 by holding back 20 students. The principal intended to use an "ungraded primary program" to hold back 70 second graders and 50 first graders in 1997-98.

Testing at the High School Level. Until now, another area of possible manipulation of reported test results has concerned the Regents Competency Tests and the Regents Exams. Since the Regents Exams can be given to any grade level, principals strategize about when to give a particular test, and whether all students who take the test should be counted in the scores. One principal reported giving RCT's to every "eligible" 11th grader, but then subtracting from his reporting pool those students with "valid reasons for removal." The SED has recently promulgated a uniform definition of an 11th grader, which should resolve this issue.

A high-stakes system like the SURR process increases the likelihood of manipulation. As long as schools are under pressure to increase test scores or lower their dropout rate, but are unsure of how to improve learning or make the school more engaging to students, they may find ways to improve their numbers without necessarily improving schooling.

The Prospects and Challenges of a Value-Added Approach to Assessing School Progress.

New York State's Board of Regents has decided that the State should have a unified assessment system. This means that the more complex assessment system currently in use in New York City cannot be employed as part of the statewide system. However, since the SED has asked us to review the possibilities of a value-added approach, the options we suggest below are based on experimentally separating out New York City data. As a number of researchers have noted, value-added measures can provide a useful contribution to the assessment of a school's academic success, or assess how much schools contribute to their students' academic and developmental growth over a given period. If used to help identify schools that might fall under Registration Review, value-added measures can contribute to the assessment of a school's academic success or failure for the following reasons:

First, SED's current methods of identifying low-performing schools depend on school-aggregate measures of test-score performance, and therefore do not consider the entering levels of student performance. This problem is sharply experienced by middle schools that receive large proportions of their students from SURR elementary schools.

Second, the SED's current identification methods rely predominantly on year-to-year comparisons of school-level aggregate test score performance, and currently only compare the extent of performance growth (or lack of growth) of the same cohort of students for decisions regarding schools in gray areas.

Third, the SED's current identification methods do not consider, or adjust for, the possible effects on aggregate school performance of any factors external to the school, such as changes in student populations due to migration or rezoning, or dramatic shifts in neighborhood economic status. In the following discussion, we suggest how value-added measures might transcend these current limitations in SED's identification processes.

A Framework for Value-Added Measures. Value-added measures are developed from student-level performance; all school-level value-added measures are aggregations of individual student results. These measures are always longitudinal, measuring baseline performance, assessed at student entry to the school or at an initial testing point, against subsequent assessments collected across the student's school career.

To assess what schools contribute to students' academic and developmental growth, value-added measures should be multiple rather than singular. Initial measurements of academic growth, for example, could involve assessments in reading and writing, math, science, and social studies at the elementary school level, and a wider range of subject areas at the middle and high school levels. But if academic growth is defined as intellectual competency rather than as specific disciplinary

mastery, broader categories of skills, such as logic, analytic capacity, and critical thinking could be included in the assessment.

What should also be factored into such an effort is that schools are not the sole contributor to students' academic and developmental growth. Ideally, a value-added measurement schema would differentiate the specific school contributions to students' academic and developmental growth from the non-school (family, community organization, peer and mass media influence) contributions. Obviously, constructing assessments for this theoretical schema is a much more complex task than specifying a value-added metric that the SED might use to help differentiate among low-performing schools.

Measuring Academic Value-Added: An Initial Schema. Assume that the site of the measurement effort is a middle school or high school, and that a collection of assessment results reflecting a student's previous schooling experience can form the baseline for the measures we will discuss. (If the measurement site is an elementary school, it would be necessary to use the entering year, or the initial year of the school's testing program, as the baseline year.)

Hopefully students enter with a battery of previous assessment results, usually standardized tests in reading and mathematics, and sometimes in other subject areas. Thus the simplest value-added measure, already employed by the New York City Board of Education in reading test reporting, is a longitudinal comparison of standardized test score results for individual students across a number of years, aggregated into school-level averages or gain scores. (Gain scores are the extent of student performance gain, or loss, over the previous year's performance.) Such longitudinal comparisons, characterized as cohort samples because students are followed across multiple years, are now aggregated by the BOE and presented as school-level value-added results.

Note that even this very simple value-added measure presents some significant drawbacks. First, year-to-year comparisons of the same student's scores will not capture normally expected growth. If, for example, a third grader registers a Normal Curve Equivalent score of 50 on the third grade test, and another 50 on the fourth grade test, the scores indicate that the student is mastering the material in both grades. Yet the student's gain score would be zero (no numeric gain from year to year), in spite of the real gains in learning the student has achieved. This problem could be addressed by instituting testing at the beginning and end of each school year, a practice that would also make mobility tracking much easier. But the expenses and the disruption associated with twice-a-year testing might well prove prohibitive.

Second, the gains measured by a year-to-year testing scheme are not equally distributed, or equally valuable. Students who already achieve high test scores are not likely to register as significant year-to-year gains as students whose baseline scores are quite low. Thus student-to-student gain score comparisons will often not be valid. However, because school-level value-added results are aggregates of

individual student gain scores, this factor will distort the aggregates much less than individual student-to-student comparisons. As a rough measure, school-level aggregates of gain scores would still offer a more refined metric than the current year-to-year aggregate comparison methods.

A third problem is more significant. Many SURR schools are characterized by high student mobility rates. When student-level scores are compared across, say, three years, and the gain (or failure to gain) scores are aggregated to the school level, students who entered or left the school within the three-year period are not counted in the results. Our data analysis of SURR schools indicates that, at the high-mobility end, some schools retain less than 25 percent of their initially tested cohort over a three year period.

In our view, a value-added metric that aggregates longitudinal student gain scores based on less than half the initially tested cohort cannot produce reliable or useful information about overall school performance. Cohort performance for a school with less than 25% of its initially tested students remaining for three years, for example, could show significant gains, while the school's aggregate test score performance remains very far from state standards.

One solution to the problem of student mobility is to use a modified linear model. This model would aggregate pre-to post-test scores-- preferably from the beginning of the school year to a point closer to the end of the school year-- from student-level results to school-level indicators, for all the schools in the New York City system (and ultimately in the entire state). Once individual school gain scores are calculated, a system-wide regression analysis can be implemented to identify non-school performance factors, such as excessive mobility, that might unduly elevate or depress gain scores. Although we recognize the dangers of differentiated expectations, the regression analysis would identify a category of schools whose low performance was clearly affected by factors such as mobility, large-scale immigration or dramatic changes in family economic situation. These schools would require a separate investigation into their aggregate school-level performance to assess their distance from state standards.

But for the remaining schools that the regression analysis indicated were unaffected by exogenous factors, the average gain score (or more accurately, the failure to gain score) would become a useful indicator of school-level low performance.

This linear value-added scheme might usefully employ other simple indicators as performance measures. Attendance provides a useful example. If a school is striving to build a sense of commitment and community among all its students, longitudinal comparisons of attendance using the baseline record from the student's previous school might prove a useful indicator. In middle schools, it might be possible to isolate the encouraging or discouraging effects of the new school environment by comparing changes in student attendance in feeder elementary schools to attendance across time in the middle school grades. Additionally, since there is some average decline in attendance associated with student maturity/aging, it might also be valuable to report the annual proportion of students who attended

school regularly (reaching or exceeding a set standard such as 90%), or to track the attendance of students over time by quartile so that changes for subgroups of students can be determined.

Starting in New York City. The initial value-added measure we propose is possible to construct in New York City because the BOE's data system uses individual student records as its baseline for aggregation. To extend such a metric to schools across New York State, the SED would have to construct a statewide student-level database, a quite daunting prospect. But the SED's current 3rd, 6th and 8th grade testing results in reading and math (the grade levels will change as the new state assessment system is introduced) could be aggregated into a statewide assessment database, creating the initial data necessary to construct a first-level value-added measure. Moreover, since more than 95% of the current cohort of SURR schools are in New York City, the SED could use the BOE's database to construct a New York City-specific value-added metric, with the gradual addition of schools outside New York City.

How might the SED construct a value-added assessment strategy to advance its SED's processes for identifying low-performing schools, at least for schools in New York City? Using the BOE's database, the SED could generate a school-level gain score for every school in the City system, using student-level test score results in both reading and mathematics, comparing those scores longitudinally, and aggregating the results up to the school level (possibly even modifying testing times to better correspond with the school year). Next, the SED could construct a system-wide regression analysis which would identify any school whose gain scores were unduly affected by factors identified by the SED as exogenous to the school. Those schools identified by this regression analysis would be subjected to additional analysis of their aggregate yearly test score results, rather than their gain scores. The aggregate performance scores (actually test score gains or losses) of the remaining schools would be analyzed to identify those schools whose significant test-score losses, across time, indicate they are low-performing schools.

In order to test the value-added measures we discuss above, it would be necessary to include in the gain score analysis a significantly larger range of poorly-performing schools than the current SURR cohort. The SED might use a low-performing subset of schools, similar to the one we constructed for Chapter II, for this larger group. Moreover the second step, the regression analysis, would require using all of the system's schools, by levels (elementary, middle, high) for appropriate analysis, and might best be conducted using hierarchical higher linear modeling (HLM), with individual student test scores nested into grades and schools. Constructing such an analysis would be a very significant task. However, we believe that using this combination of value-added measures would result in a more accurate identification of low-performing schools than the measures SED is currently using. (The SED currently reviews some value-added measures when making decisions

about the Registration Review status of schools. But these value-added measures are not the primary data elements examined.)

Summary and Recommendations

One of the most difficult aspects of the SURR process is the attempt to establish whether and why schools are improving or failing to improve. Although test scores provide a beginning measure, the high stakes associated with the State's accountability system make the scores reported by schools vulnerable to manipulation.

While the changes associated with genuine school improvement are the only guarantees against the manipulation of school-based data, several incremental shifts might reduce the tendency to concentrate solely on improving test results:

- If performance indicators were expanded to include multiple assessments, rather than a single test score, it would be harder for schools to manipulate their testing pools

- Recent SED policy changes will include more LEP students in the testing body. In addition, we urge the SED to move rapidly toward incorporating special education students to ensure that test scores reflect the widest possible pool of student test-takers.

- The New York State Regents have argued for a unitary system of assessment in the state. Nevertheless, we suggest that the SED use New York City data to experiment with a limited value-added measure in assessing students' academic learning.

- As a long-range plan, we suggest that the SED help to strengthen local assessment programs throughout the state, so that more comprehensive measures, including a value-added assessment, might be instituted statewide.

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VII. An Overview of State Initiatives for Low-Performing Schools and the Literature on School Reform

> "Building the capacity to change teaching and learning means creating the opportunity for administrators, researchers, and policy makers, as well as educators, to learn new ways of doing their jobs."
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> --J.L. David, *Systemic Reform Creating the Capacity for Change*[59]

In this chapter, we review state initiatives to identify and improve low-performing schools outside New York, and analyze recent literature on school reform, particularly research on strategic planning and capacity building. New York was one of the first states to focus attention on low-performing schools, and the State Education Department's Registration Review process remains one of the most developed state programs for identifying and assisting low-performing schools. However, while New York has gone beyond many other states, particularly in the supports it provides to SURR schools, current research suggests several programmatic guidelines that may be useful in strengthening the planning process and staff development, so that school-level capacity-building moves the whole school toward reform.

By February 1997, twenty states had implemented what have been called "academic bankruptcy laws.[60] These laws sanction schools and districts for poor performance, and give states expanded power to generate school improvement, including by taking over or closing districts and schools that do not make significant progress within a specified period. While the processes for identification, support, takeover or school closure vary among states, state intervention in low performing schools is relatively new and state education departments have experimented with only a limited repertoire of strategies.

Raising Standards. Like New York, other states have generally developed their initiatives to improve low-performing schools within a framework of raising standards for all students. Several states, including Mississippi and Texas, have defined a range of performance tiers, from unacceptable to exemplary. In Texas, the tier system applies to both individual schools and districts; while schools are rated from *exemplary* to *low-performing*, districts receive an accreditation status

ranging from *exemplary* to *academically unacceptable*.[61] Alabama has two categories of warnings to low-performing schools: *academic caution*, for schools significantly below the national average on the Stanford Achievement Test; and *academic alert*, for schools at the extreme low end.[62]

Some states are also explicit about improving the effectiveness, efficiency and professionalism of teachers, principals, and the central administration, and some focus on ensuring the cleanliness and safety of their schools.

Indicators. States describe their goals in a variety of ways, from "ensuring that all students achieve high standards"[63] (Massachusetts) to "providing an education that allows students to develop their abilities to their full potential"[64] (Georgia). Yet states' indicators of school performance rely heavily on standardized test scores, generally in math and reading, and occasionally in writing and science. Some states also consider graduation and "vocational completer" rates (Ohio); rates of "successful transition" to post-secondary work or education (Kentucky); dropout and/or attendance rates; as well as special education enrollment.

Most states specify acceptable benchmarks in each of these areas, by comparing standardized test scores to the national average and creating their own acceptable cut-off point. However, some states designate low-performance as the lowest quartile of school performance in the state, whereas others consider it to be 50 percent of the school's or district's students not performing at grade level, and still others determine it by declining student test scores. A few states combine these measures: in Illinois, the *academic early warning / watch list* designates those schools in which either at least 50 percent of the students failed to reach state standards on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program tests for two consecutive years, or the schools' scores declined significantly over a three-year period. In Missouri, the lowest 50 schools not meeting "minimum academic achievement" are considered *concerned schools*, although only 20 new schools are identified each year. Similarly, in North Carolina, low-performing schools are those identified as failing to meet the minimum growth standards and having a majority of students performing below grade level.

High-stakes testing programs have made the manipulation of test scores, through controlling the body of test-takers, a national problem. Among the states to have taken proactive steps in this area, North Carolina has included in its definition of low-performance, any school with more than minimal exemptions of students from the testing body.

Warnings. States generally offer several levels of warnings. While the first warning may come immediately after a school shows unacceptably low test scores, it is more common for a state to wait until the triggering condition has existed for two or more consecutive years.

Assistance to Low-Performing Schools. First warnings are often accompanied by an analysis of the school's problems and the provision of some

assistance. Several states require low-performing schools to generate self-studies and/or plans for improvement (Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma), but a few states appoint an outside audit team, similar to New York's Registration Review, to analyze what is wrong with the school (Missouri, North Carolina).

As in New York, the analysis of necessary improvements for the school or district is generally accompanied by targeted assistance and financial resources, and a grace period of several years during which to improve. In Oklahoma, a low-performing school may be adopted by an institution of higher education as a developmental research school.[65] Kentucky's STAR (School Transformation Assistance and Renewal) Project offers planning and assistance to schools in academic trouble, including the assignment of a master-teacher/distinguished educator.[66] In Illinois, state-provided remediation includes assembling a team to assess the school's needs, developing a corrective plan to address deficiencies, identifying needed support for the plan, and creating a time-line with specific goals.[67] In North Carolina, assistance teams, composed of practicing teachers and staff, representatives of higher education, school administrators, and others, are assigned to each low-performing school. These teams conduct needs assessments, plan a course of action, and deliver services to improve student achievement.[68]

Several states (Iowa, Mississippi, and New Jersey) focus on intervention at the district level. In Mississippi, districts on probation receive technical assistance and are linked to institutions of higher education.[69]

Censure of Professional Staff. In several states, the focus is on removing and/or decertifying both the professional staff and the local board of education, rather than on providing assistance to failing schools and districts. In Tennessee, if a school or school system has been on probation for two consecutive years, the commissioner is authorized to recommend the removal of both the local board and the superintendent.[70] In Massachusetts, principals in "chronically under-performing schools" can be removed and superintendents in districts with schools that lose their accreditation may have their own certificates revoked.[71] In North Carolina, the state board can dismiss a teacher, assistant principal, director, or supervisor after two consecutive evaluations that find inadequate performance.[72] In South Carolina, superintendents of *substandard districts* may have their contracts voided, principals of *substandard schools* may be removed and prohibited from serving in any other administrative position in the district, and teachers' contracts are renewed only at the discretion of the local superintendent.[73]

These procedures, while necessary in many instances, are examples of, "trying to improve without spending a dime," a tactic of legislators and governing boards for self-survival.

Takeover and closure. New York state, which gives schools 3 years to improve, stands in the middle, with other states giving schools between two and five years for improvement. Only two states (New Jersey and Kentucky) have exercised

the district takeover option; however, the final step of the process for a dozen other states is also the takeover of the school district. This includes the unseating of local boards, the removal of the superintendent (Massachusetts), or the appointment of a management team (Missouri), monitor (Ohio), or a distinguished educator (Kentucky). In Iowa and Arkansas, a failing school district can be merged or consolidated with one or more contiguous districts. In New Jersey, the state can take over a district for a minimum of five years, during which time the school board is removed and the local board of education ceases to function as the governing unit. Only one state, Maryland, can close a school or schools, but not a district.[74]

Theory of Change Implicit in State Interventions. As in New York state, processes for low performing schools are generally part of larger accountability systems in which the assumption is that clear goals, publicly available information about school success or failure, and strong incentives and sanctions can drive school improvement. The emphasis on public identification of low-performing schools suggests that most states believe that the stigma of being identified for failure is an insurmountable hindrance to improvement. In several states, the process is strongly punitive, with public censure, the removal of key individuals, monitoring, and ultimately state takeover, as the main strategies. A few states actually decrease the level of funds allocated to low-performing schools.

Many states also rely heavily on bringing in outside experts; such as superintendents or principals, managers, or a team of educational professionals. These individuals appear to have two functions: to remove less capable or less energetic staff, and to offer an objective and expert view of what needs to be improved.

All states also assume that low-performing schools need increased surveillance and control by outside authorities, or some form of monitoring. Although all the states with academic bankruptcy laws have created performance-driven systems, a number of these states have also instituted monitoring systems that focus on compliance. Finally, a number of states attempt to give extra resources and supports to low-performing schools, including linkages to universities, master teachers, and other outside practitioners.

Building Capacity for Systemic Reform: A Literature Review

The direction of research on school reform has changed significantly during the past quarter century. The traditional view was that teachers determined the difference between good and bad schooling, and that reform efforts should be targeted to individual teachers. Moreover, intervention efforts should be designed to enhance teachers' knowledge and improve their instructional skills, through the provision of workshops and university courses.[75] While the professional development of teachers has remained an important component of school reform, contemporary

efforts have understood both that many factors effecting student performance go beyond the purview of teachers, and that there are organizational issues which influence a school's capacity to deliver effective instruction.

Widening the Supports to Schools Serving Low-Income Students

The educational, economic and social problems of children and their families have contributed to conditions which make the creation of a productive learning environment difficult in many schools. As state and local agencies working to address issues of health, poverty, and crime have recognized that many of their efforts address the same children and families, they have sought to increase collaboration. The reasons prompting these collaborations are multiple.[76]

Community institutions delivering health and social services to urban youth have found that schools are where the essential users can regularly be found.[77] To limit overlapping services, schools have also been targeted as central sites for interagency partnerships. In addition, centralizing services in or near schools offers the opportunity for schools to be involved in the planning and governance of services. Finally, collaborations have been thought to create, "increased self-sufficiency, improved family functioning, and increased parent involvement within the school."[78]

The expected outcomes of school-based/school-linked collaborative services range from improved academic performance and student behavior, increased attendance, reduced grade retention, decreased referrals to special education, to changes in the school and the collaborating systems.[79] While some schools focus on short-term goals, and others are simply pleased by the additional support, lasting improvement and effectiveness are the ultimate goal. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to show the effect of school-based collaborations on student performance. While many schools do experience readily noticeable improvements in such areas as absenteeism, many schools experience only peripheral service advantages. As has been noted, "effecting change in the structure or content of the curriculum, where education takes place, is far more difficult."[80]

Staff Development. Throughout most of the twentieth century, educators have worked within a rational bureaucratic model, in which staff development has been viewed as top-down remediation.[81] Under this model, the content for staff development programs is driven largely by assumptions about what teachers need to know to accomplish the school's instructional goals. Although some researchers within this approach now recognize that staff development activities can be enhanced if attention is paid to the way in which adults learn, traditional in-service-training models continue to place teachers in a passive-receptive mode by stressing their weaknesses or deficits.[82]

In the last ten years, as educators have stressed the necessity for understanding the way organizations function, staff development has come to differ

in several significant ways. First, the older focus on how to remedy weaknesses or inadequacies of teachers' methods seen by other staff has been replaced by making the content of staff development more consistent with the needs that teachers themselves identify. This has been accompanied by a move from having in-service programs planned by a few administrators to involving teachers in planning their own programs. The assumption is that widespread participation will result in an increased commitment to and involvement in professional development activities.[83]

Second, staff development has moved from being isolated, in-service assistance to a systemic long-term process.[84] Within this process, researchers have identified five elements as key to effective programs:

1.) presentation of theory or description of the new skill or strategy;

2.) modeling or demonstration of skills or strategic models;

3.) practice in simulated and actual settings;

4.) structured and open-ended feedback to provide information about performance in the practice; and

5.) coaching for application, and the follow-up work to help with on-the-job implementation of the new skill and/or knowledge.[85]

While most staff development programs include the first three steps, recent studies have shown that feedback and coaching are most often left out of staff development programs.[86]

Prompted by research which demonstrates that systemic change occurs through changing communities of people, not individuals, school change efforts are increasingly focusing on mobilizing greater numbers of staff members.[87] Researchers also argue that the traditional model of professional development ignores the role of the school and other communities in educational improvement.[88] Related to this has been the recognition that teachers are not the only professionals who need to be involved in programs of continuous professional improvement. Instead, principals, central office administrators, support staff, superintendents, and school board members all need to be continuously involved in staff development.[89]

Capacity-Building. Contemporary literature on capacity-building often focuses on the inconsistencies between the task of school improvement and the prevailing models of professional development, in particular, the dominance of a training paradigm built on "knowledge consumption" rather than a "knowledge production" paradigm based on problem-solving.[90]

A recent study of technical assistance strategies in education, uses the model of the Urban Math Collaboratives, funded by the Ford Foundation, to argue for

change efforts that depart from traditional knowledge-transfer methods. Instead, concentrating on the work of capacity-building more in terms of strategic design, planning, vision-setting, and community-building.[91] Others define capacity as facility with the political and policy-making process, negotiation and compromise, connections to powerful individuals and institutions, relationships with unions, and many more skills not traditionally associated with the role of the educator. One researcher notes, "the success of capacity-building efforts cannot be measured by the completion of specific tasks or even mastery of the skills to complete them; the measure of success should be whether the recipients and their organizations are able to use their knowledge and skills to solve new problems in new settings."[92]

Organizational Capacity

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) has also addressed the need to take into account a school's organizational capacity. CPRE argues that: 1) teacher capacity, as well as the capacity of all participants in the educational system, is multidimensional, encompassing knowledge, skills, dispositions, and views of self; 2) individual capacity and organizational capacity are interactive and interdependent; and 3) organizational capacity, like individual capacity, can be nurtured through an infusion of ideas from outside.[93]

Planning. Strategic planning, which has been defined as "the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future."[94] Although strategic planning models differ in their particular content, emphasis, and process, the general elements usually consist of: 1) environment scanning; 2) resource analysis; 3) gap analysis; 4) formulation of strategies; and 5) implementation.[95] Some authors also argue that emphasis should be placed on the creation of a vision or mission statement to guide the development of organizational goals.[96]

Although many planning experts advise that planning be dynamic, not static, the planning literature was developed in corporate America and only rarely addresses several significant problems that plague most public sector planning processes: overexpectation, underestimation of cost, and disillusionment.[97] In fact, educational institutions are heavily dependent on such changing environmental pressures as a decreasing tax base, new immigration, and increasing rates of poverty. Thus, as a framework for school improvement activities, several researchers propose a concerns-based strategy which combines long-range strategic plans and short-range incident plans. Incident plans are defined as capacity building or "enabling activities," or interventions that make the larger strategy possible.[98]

The idea that no specific plan can be permanent, because of changes in school internal and external environments, has gained increasing support. Fullan's work has offered a non-traditional, non-linear approach to planning. In Fullan's view,

action and inquiry precede the formulation of mission and vision statements and the articulation of specific strategies.[99] Thus, an organization is in a better position if its change efforts are built on action strategies rather than on planning or reflection. Fullan's work suggests that productive educational change is heavily dependent on the ability to survive the uncertainties of planned and unplanned change, such as government policy shifts or the reduction of resources.

What States Can Learn From the Research

Contemporary research suggests several guidelines for future state interventions in low-performing schools.

1. Capacity Building While state reform initiatives emphasize schools taking charge of their own improvement efforts, states tend to employ strategies that emphasize weaknesses and deficits. The challenge is for states to use a more positive framework for viewing low-performing schools, and for state initiatives to include ways of building capacity for sustained change.

2. Strategic Planning Because of its connection to resource allocation and monitoring, planning has increasingly become a part of local and state-level school-reform efforts. However, both the nature of public-sector institutions, and the effort to build capacity among school staff, means that all planning must remain continuous and dynamic, with plans used as evolving documents that are part of a continuous process of reflection and response to ever-changing conditions.

3. The Critical Mass Needed for Reform Despite the findings in the literature that the more staff are involved in the reform process, the more successful it will be, many states focus on a small group of individuals to create school change--the outside experts brought in to diagnose a failing school, or the small group of teachers selected for training in particular instructional change efforts.

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In 1985, the New York State Education Department began to identify and intervene in the State's low-performing schools. Through its Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) process, the State Education Department offers supports to New York's low-performing schools. Those schools whose performance improves sufficiently are removed from Registration Review; those which have not met their performance targets are either deregistered and closed or redesigned. By 1996–97, 139 public schools had been identified as SURR. Of these, 40 had either improved sufficiently to be removed from the SURR list or were reorganized or closed, and 99 continued under Registration Review.

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